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OR, THE

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1853.

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PREFACE.

THE main design in the composition of this volume, and that to which every other has been carefully subordinated, was the delineation of the actual life of an Emigrant Family, and the scenery about their homestead in the Australian colonies, in the middle of the nineteenth century. Of course, all must not expect to meet with a Martin Beck for an overseer: but with the single exception of the introduction of a character necessary to furnish the tale with sufficient of plot to interest the lovers of romance, everything exhibited is a simple copy from actual daily life.

The use, moreover, which I have made of the character of Beck will be found a most legitimate and important one: that of exhibiting to the new settler the various great errors which may be fallen into, and must be guarded against. For, in fact, I have merely concentrated in him singly, what the settler may easily enough meet with in a more dissipated form at the hands of several.

The geographical features of the country are given exactly in the present tale, except in the mere instance of the particular

spot at which the family is located. The reasons for that exception, and its propriety, will be obvious to every reflecting person.

Should the reader accord this volume a full perusal, I render him the most valuable return in my power:—I wish him as pure and ample a pleasure as I found myself in making the acquaintance of the ladies of the tale.

THE AUTHOR OF "SETTLERS AND CONVICTS."

(Knight's Monthly Volume.)

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MARTIN BECK;

OR,

THE STORY OF AN AUSTRALIAN SETTLER.

CHAPTER I.

New settlers and Australians—Looking for land—Lieutenant Bracton and his family.

On the track from Sydney to Port Philip, through the interior of Australia, before it emerges from the well-settled districts into the intermediate wilds, there stands a neat and comfortable house of entertainment, long known as Lupton's inn—so called after the proprietor and host, a steady but enterprising Australian, by whom it was established. In the aspect of the country immediately within sight, there is nothing remarkable to the English eye; the newest emigrant might easily suppose himself on the borders of an English country village. Here, a level, well-fenced field exhibits tokens of the husbandman's toils; there, the primeval forest, without any very striking features, borders the road-side; and the straight, broad, level road itself, made under the direction of the Colonial surveyors, by convict gangs, competes with our best roads around the British metropolis. If anything gives a feature of Australian character to the scene, it is the cloudlessness of the deep blue sky, and the rather oppressive heat of the atmosphere.

On opposite sides of the equator, the seasons of the year are, of course, reversed. For several weeks after the December midsummer of the colony, glowing days occur—days on which the strong westerly winds, blowing from the parched wastes of the interior, render travelling more than ordinarily toilsome. On the evening of such a day, about an hour before sun-down, there rode up to the verandah of the road-side inn an elderly man of portly presence, with the bearing of an English country gentleman, accompanied by a younger, apparently his son. The more youthful traveller had just so much of the aspect and manners of a sailor, as a seafaring life usually impresses upon men of good breeding and education. These were Lieutenant Bracton and his son Willoughby, on their way from Port Philip to Sydney.

Scarcely were the horses relieved of the weight of their riders, which in the case of the elder was by no means insignificant, when

a heavy drove of cattle came tramping and jostling each other from the opposite direction; the loud and heavy cracks of a stock-whip fell thick and fast on the ear, mingled with the quick barking of several collies, and the occasional "Yho, ho, ho!" of a horseman, as he rode in the rear of the horned mob, and urged them onward toward the inn. The host, forgetting his newly-arrived guests, at the well-known sound, was in an instant out in front of the verandah.

The Australians, we must here remark, are growing up a race by themselves; fellowship of country has already began to distinguish them and bind them together in a very remarkable manner. Whenever they come into contact with each other, even when considerable difference of rank exists, this sympathy operates strongly: there is no attempt either to cheek or conceal it. After an instant's survey, the host, a fine-looking and respectable man, well to do in the world, turned suddenly round to one of his men, exclaiming—

"Reuben Kable from Broken Bay! What a mob of kangaroos he's got!" then hastily motioning the man to throw down the slip rails of the fence, he advanced into the middle of the road, and, facing the rushing drove, he waved his broad-leafed straw hat before them, and having checked their headlong career, turned them in through the open panel to their night's resting-place. Their driver was now riding leisurely behind, wheeling his practised horse, and flourishing the eleven-foot thong of his short-handled stock-whip, as one or another of the beasts turned and strove to rush back down the road, bringing it into the herd again with a touch from the hard hide-lash, that sent the pulverized skin and hair of the beast flying up like smoke.

"Where did you get that mob from, Reuben?" inquired the host, his good-humoured smile of old acquaintanceship mingling with a slight satirical laugh at the wild, raw-boned aspect of a large portion of the drove.

"Everywhere: from Brisbane Water to Mangrove Creek," replied the young stockman. "Some of them have never been in a yard since they were calved. I could never get them out of the mountains before; but the fire swept all the grass off just before Christmas, and they've got as tame as dogs; so I thought it was a good chance for getting them up to Manaroo. Eighteen months there will make them look very different. Is the feed good?"

"Never better when I came down—that's a month ago."

"There's been some very hot weather since that," said the Australian, inquiringly.

"They've had good thunder-showers with it."

The new comer bowed to the two travellers with the air of a person used to good society, and, throwing himself easily off his horse, wound the long thong of his whip, in the customary way, up and down the myrtle handle, and flinging it under the verandah, proceeded to unbridle his horse and take off the saddle. The animal, at a friendly pat from his rider, swung round, and walked off to his accustomed grazing ground.

Reuben Kable was the possessor of considerable property in horned cattle, and the resident and owner of one of those small but first-rate farms given to settlers by free grant in the early days of the colony. His homestead was at Broken Bay, a port some twenty miles or more to the north of Port Jackson. He exhibited a more than ordinarily full and forcible manifestation of the common characteristics of his countrymen, through possessing more than ordinary intellectual endowments. His height was considerably over six feet; his person slim, but remarkably vigorous and active; his face symmetrical, and just saved from being fair by a slight tint of tan; his hair brown; his eye of that peculiar grey which in the hours of common thought is so unsuggestive and pretenceless, but glitters and flashes under strong excitement like the crystals of a mineral in the sunlight. The utter, yet not discourteous, nonchalance of his race, however, would have been regarded by a stranger as his most distinctive characteristic.

Lieutenant Bracton and his son forgot the weariness of their long hot journey in the cordial salutation of the tall, handsome, quaker-like native, who frankly introduced himself to them, according to the custom of his countrymen—

"Are you on the road before me, gentlemen, or going down the country?" inquired the Australian.

"From Melbourne," said Willoughby Bracton. "We have been in search of land; but my father is not fully satisfied with any we have met with hitherto."

"Newly arrived in the colony, then?"

"About three months ago."

"But you can find no land unoccupied hereabouts—scarcely, indeed, for the last hundred miles you have come."

"The fact is," said the lieutenant, "we are now going on to Sydney, almost without any other object than curiosity to see your chief city. We may avail ourselves when there of the opportunity of returning to Port Philip by water; but we have thought nothing about land for some days past."

"You have had some heavy showers on the road, I suppose? I judge by the thunder-showers at Manaroo. The Port Philip track lies off to the interior of the Warragong Mountains as Manaroo does seaward of them. The thunder weather mostly gathers there. Probably you know them only as they are named on the maps as the Australian Alps."

"We had two or three slight thunder-storms," replied Willoughby; "but they were all in the day-time. My father is an old sailor, and the disappointment of his search annoys him a great deal more than the weather."

A very short time suffices to provide a dinner in the interior of the colony. The quarter of beef, or side of mutton, or cask of salted pork, is generally at hand; and a fresh junk of wood on the hearth soon brings the frying-pan into a state of service. A steak off the rump of one of mine host's best four-year-old bullocks, killed a day or two before soon steamed savory on the parlour

table. A new damper, or cake of flour baked without yeast, sweet as a nut, and smelling only of the pure wheat, and hot out of the wood-ashes of the hearth, but clean as if baked in an oven, accompanied it. A bottle of porter, and a couple of glasses for the English guests, together with the tea-tray, and its apparatus, in compliance with the already-known taste of the Australian traveller, completed the preparations: preparations, the seasonableness of which was soon well vindicated by the travellers' appetites. It is very often the end of his day's stage that determines the hour of the bushman's dinner. The mellow light of the setting sun lay golden and still, and almost holy, upon forest and field, as Lieutenant Bracton and his son, and Reuben Kable, walked out again to enjoy they their cigars, and he his short waistcoat pocket pipe, in the cool air, under the verandah. "If my knowledge and advice, Lieutenant Bracton, can be of any service to you in your undertaking, either in selecting your land or making your other arrangements," said the Australian, "I shall contribute them with a great deal of pleasure. I hear at times from your countryfolks that they consider us a very plain, rough race; but I believe we have a good reputation for uprightness. To say that our knowledge of colonial (*Anglicè*, Australian) matters is tolerably sound, is to say but little in our praise. If we do not understand our own country and its affairs, what should we understand?"

In reply to the thanks of his new acquaintances, and their expression of eagerness to have the advantage of his advice, the colonist went on to what was probably the pith and motive of his communication:—

"It has struck me several times, since I heard your means and wishes explained more fully than you stated them at first, that a farm which I see stands advertised in one of the Sydney papers for sale by private contract, would suit you, in the first instance, rather better than new land."

"The price of course much higher?"

"No: I have no doubt you may get it for ready cash at very little, if any, more than the government upset price. The owner is moving his stock across to the Port Philip district; and from what I know of him, I dare say that if he can get anything like his own money by private contract, he'll jump at the chance—that is, with the cash in hand—rather than delay or go to public auction. But if you like to persevere and find a tract of Government land within the colony of New South Wales, there's no doubt but you can do it. You can always ascertain at the surveyor-general's office where such land lies; and any stock-keeper about the part will show you the best run,* and the best spot for a station, for five pounds: I could get a hundred runs found for me in a couple of months for five pounds a piece. But I should recommend the chance I was telling you of."

"What quantity of land is there?"

* Any tract of land for depasturing stock.

"Just the two sections; twelve hundred and eighty acres: that is plenty large enough for a first farm. As your stock increases, you can always form stations further out. One of the most important things is to get good water at a home-station; and at the Rocky Springs, the station I have been speaking about, there is some of the best water in the country, and the springs never fail in the greatest droughts. There is another circumstance of the locality which to my mind greatly increases the value of land thereabouts —it is not above sixty or seventy miles from a good harbour. It is on the upper part of the Morrumbidgee river. At present there is no road from that to the sea, passable by drays, because there is no large settlement on that part of the coast; but with several good harbours, and some of the richest soil in the colony on that part of the coast, in course of time there must be. Active colonization had just extended about so far along the seaside when the southern settlements came into notice; and as soon as it was found that the interior could be traversed to them, off everybody went down the tract to Port Philip, and colonization along the coast almost ceased. But when the country behind Port Philip comes to be pretty well filled up, the next thing will probably be the extension of the colonies coastwise, and along the interior to meet each other; and whenever that takes place, there will certainly be a great main road made from the heads of the Morrumbidgee, which are almost midway between the two colonies, to the coast: settlers will never travel with their wool teams two or three hundred miles to a shipping place, when Bateman's Bay and Twofold Bay are within half or a third of the distance."

"Your description of the land and its situation, Mr. Kable," said Willoughby, "impresses me very much in favour of it."

"If you should finally fix on it," rejoined his informant, "I think, by seeing the agent in Sydney pretty early, you may make almost sure of it. Money is very scarce; and I know the proprietor is one of those restless people that, now he has got the notion in his head of going to the Port Philip country, nothing will content him till he gets there. At the same time, it's ten to one if any one makes an offer for the land, except some of those fellows in Sydney, who buy to sell again; and they'll never give him cash: or, if they do, they'll want it at about half value."

"Who is the agent?" inquired Lieutenant Bracton.

"I really did not take notice; but I dare say they have the paper in-doors. You'll find it advertised as 'The Rocky Springs.' Are you aware whether there is likely to be any change in the Regulations—the Land Regulations?".

"I believe not," said the lieutenant. "The British Government takes its ground slowly and surely; and such being the case, ought not to give way to every passing wish for innovation."

"Ah! indeed!" exclaimed the Australian, with an unmistakeable alteration of tone and manner. "I recollect hearing of the time when free grants of land were the custom of this country; and then, although there seldom lay a dozen three-masted vessels in

the waters of Sydney Cove at once, and the voyage was often spun out to five or six months, we had rich emigrants flocking here in shoals. Plenty of money came to the colony; we had plenty of customers for our herds: everything went ahead. Now it takes all an emigrant's capital to purchase his land."

"That may be very true, sir," replied Lieutenant Bracton. "Meantime, we can only act on things as they are, not as they used to be."

"But you forget, Mr. Kable," said Willoughby, "that the proceeds of the land sales are applied to the conveyance of labourers to the colony, without whom the land would be worth nothing."

"I confess, sir," said the native, "that, coming from the parent community, you gentlemen ought to understand the business better than I do: indeed, I cannot comprehend it at all. In the first place (though I do not lay great stress on that), when these labourers reach here, we have to pay them from the time they begin to work: then, in the next (which I lay every stress upon), I pay for my section of six hundred and forty acres, just six hundred and forty pounds. One section of land will feed one—and only one—flock of sheep; and that one flock of sheep is one man's—and only one man's—work. Well, the cost of a single male emigrant's passage from the British Islands to these colonies is eighteen or twenty pounds. Twenties in six hundred and forty, there are thirty-two. Now, then, have I paid my six hundred and forty pounds for that one man's passage, or have I paid the passage of thirty-two labourers; when I only get, and only want, the one?"

"It certainly has a very anomalous look. I never saw the principle in that light before," replied Willoughby.

"I will admit, that my statement is made broadly," continued Reuben Kable, "and that there are circumstances that modify slightly its bearing. For instance: this one flock of sheep requires half the labour of a second man as hut-keeper and night watchman, besides hurdles and wool-sheds, and team-drivers for the conveyance of their wool to a port: all which together, however, would not make up more than fully the labour of the second emigrant. And also, it may be added that land is obtainable for grazing without purchase, on rent. But, after all, in a vast proportion of cases the hardship of the arrangement to a man of limited capital remains. In fact, it comes to this: the large stockholder can push his flocks out into ground rented for almost a nominal sum, but the owner of one or two flocks has no need to go beyond his homestead, which is purchased at this enormous rate; so that the little stockholder is paying for the conveyance of the great stockholder's labourers to the colony. My neighbour, with his hundred flocks on ground rented for almost nothing, is shepherding his flocks with the other fifty or sixty men conveyed to the colony at the cost of the twelve hundred and eighty pounds I paid for my run of two sections, for my two first, and, as yet, only flocks."

As the speaker ceased, he knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and restoring it to its usual place in his waistcoat pocket, walked down to his cattle. Meanwhile Lieutenant Bracton, during the remarks of the Australian, had silently withdrawn himself to the other end of the verandah, where he stood smoking his cigar. The moon was shining with all that brilliancy of light that renders it so remarkable an object as it glides through the lovely skies of the colony, and a plentiful dew was already glistening on the rails, as the young bushman laid his arms upon them, and scrutinized his herd. Some were prone, sleepily chewing the cud; others stood motionless alongside the fences; occasionally some crusty old cow butted away with rude horn a strange calf that came wandering in its waywardness up to her side; and now and then one would thrust forward its head, as if to see whether the rails that held them in duress were about to be taken down.

As Reuben Kable recurred to the remark of Lieutenant Bracton in vindication of the parent country, followed by silent withdrawal as his strictures had become more pointed, the feeling passed through his mind—"I hope I have not offended the old gentleman: he seems a fine manly old chap." At that instant a hand was laid upon his shoulder.

"I have been settling it with my father," said Willoughby, who now stood beside him, "to turn my horse's head and ride back with you as far as you go toward 'the Rocky Springs,' and 'take a lunar' at them. My father will go on to Sydney, and hear what instructions the agent has."

"You could not do a better thing," replied Reuben. "My cattle travel very wild; some of them are off down every gully they see:—you can ride up to my station with me: and stick to the tail of 'em, while I keep 'em out of the bush. And then I'll ride back by the Morrumbidgee and show you the station at 'the Rocky Springs.'"

In depicting the various characteristics of the colony and its different classes, no primary and contradistinguishing features must be overlooked. The reader may observe here a little trait of the Australian character—thrift. If *two* birds can be killed by a stone, the Australian is never content to kill but *one*. It must, however, be added, that this thrift is rarely accompanied by what we call duplicity: it results more from a habit of economy than from selfishness.

The proposed arrangement appeared as desirable to Lieutenant Bracton as it was agreeable to his son: it was therefore determined upon as the next day's course of the travellers.

The family of Lieutenant Bracton consisted of his wife, his son Willoughby, and a younger son who remained behind in England studying for the medical profession; together with two young ladies: the younger his only daughter Marianna, the elder an orphan niece named Katharine.

Some years had elapsed since Lieutenant Bracton retired from the Royal Navy for the express purpose of becoming a settler in these colonies. But the project, unexpectedly delayed by family

occurrences, was now only in course of being carried out. Previously to his retirement, Lieutenant Bracton had for some years been in command of one of the smaller vessels of the navy; and considerable periods of Willoughby's boyhood were spent with his father at sea. His latter years, up to the commencement of the tale, were passed chiefly in the whaling ships of the Greenland seas. During that time, the young man had acquired—more through success, perhaps, than extraordinary economy—a handsome little capital of his own, in addition to some bequests of relatives. The family funds, on the other hand, had on the whole diminished; increasing, proportionately as they did so, the solicitude of its heads, and their desire to found an independent home of progressive promise for their children. For it may be further added, that Katherine Bracton, though only a niece, had always been regarded as one of their own children by her uncle and aunt. Her father, Lieutenant Bracton's elder and sole brother, dying on a foreign station, and her mother soon afterwards, Mrs. Bracton had taken the little orphan, and soon became fondly attached to her charge. Such was the little cluster of human life that had now betaken themselves to the enterprise of founding a home at the antipodes.

CHAPTER II.

Cattle driving—A rest in the bush—An Australian fog—"The Rocky Springs."

ANOTHER dazzling morning broke out from the east, speedily chasing the chill and dew of the moonlit night. By the time the sun was two hours' high, its beams were hot and its light a blaze: and myriads of the insect world filled the ear with their low continuous hum, which swells fuller and fuller until it begins to cease, almost suddenly, under the intense heat of noon.

The driving of a hundred and fifty head of lean cattle between two and three hundred miles through a parched country is a serious charge. The young Australian's breakfast was completed before his companions had well begun theirs, so that, by the time Willoughby was ready to mount, the drove was straggling loosely but impatiently up the road. Their driver with difficulty held in his strong stock-horse (which manifested no less impatience to be off,) shifting himself restlessly in the saddle, as he lingered talking with his countryman on the road in front, and throwing alternate glances toward the cattle, and toward the door whence his companion was to appear.

With no little satisfaction Reuben Kable saw the Englishman's foot in the stirrup at last; and, with a rough "Good-day, captain!" to the old weather-beaten tar they were leaving behind, and a nod to the host, he gave his horse the head, and slightly bending forward over the horse's neck to gain power, he gave a

three-quarter swing round of the long thong above his head, and back it came with a crack like a rifle.

"Hey, hey, hey! yo-ho! Here, Nance, Nance, twenty dogs in one! put 'em together! fetch 'em out, good bitch!" shouted the Australian; and in a minute the whole mob were rushing and jostling again along the road, and kicking up the cloud of dust that furnishes the stock-driver with one of the principal parts of his professional avocations, that of chewing sand all day. "Now, my lad," he cried to Willoughby, who, following for the first time in his life such a blindfold chase, strove to keep up to the tail of the cattle without running into them; "we must make Mittagong, if these poor beasts are to have any dinner."

In another minute, cattle, and horsemen, and dust swept rapidly round an elbow of the bush; and the lieutenant saw nothing but the dingy white cloud as it rose and swept away on the wind.

The old gentleman soon afterwards ordered his horse, and rode leisurely on towards Sydney, with considerably more satisfaction than he had felt for some time. His family had now been nearly three months in Melbourne, and the agent whom he had entrusted to discover for him a tract of land worth purchasing, was yet unsuccessful; probably because Lieutenant Bracton also rented of him the cottage he was occupying in the town. Willoughby had suggested a personal tour of inspection; but the further they advanced into the interior, the more sterile and unsatisfactory everything appeared to Europeans, unused to the scorched appearance of Australian vegetation in the summer months. At length the names of Yass, and Argyle, and Sydney, came to be mentioned by the travellers they met, as places so near that they felt the inclination to pursue the journey forward, and at least inspect the elder colony before finally settling in the new.

From Lupton's inn to the fine flats at the foot of the Mittagong range, where Reuben Kable intended to rest his cattle during the heat of the day, is something above thirteen miles. In some parts the road passes over ground full of loose stone, which, pulverized by the heat and the crush of feet and vehicles, becomes in summer a thick bed of hot dust; in others, steep hills add to the toil of travelling; and almost the whole way a close bush borders the road on both sides, rendering the air stagnant and sultry. Somewhat less than three hours' exertion, however, brought the horsemen down into the flats, stretching far away in open plains to the left. No longer urged by dog and man, the weary drove relaxed their pace, and, turning off the road, wandered slowly on in straggling and broken groups toward the spot to which their instinct drew them for water. Willoughby, following his companion's example, dismounted in the shade of the trees; which here, rooted in rich ground, and supplied with a plenitude of moisture, sustain spreading heads of the thickest foliage, that furnish the wayfarer with the most delightful resting-place.

The horses were soon unsaddled and unbridled: not, however,

without being first hobbled. A mounted bushman's accoutrements are his horse's hobbles, or else a long tether rope, which is coiled round the animal's neck when travelling; a good blanket or a cloak, made of opossum skins sewn together, to the size of about eight or nine feet by seven, and capable, when sound and doubled, of turning off a night's rain; a tin quart pot, and sundry bags containing tea, sugar, "damper," and beef. The quart pot is generally strapped to the saddle in front, on one side; the hobbles on the other; the ration-bags hanging across, and the blanket, or opossum cloak, carefully formed into a long hard roll, and fastened sometimes before and sometimes behind, is bent over the horse's back. The tinder-box, or its modern substitute, the lucifer match-box, is invariably stowed in the most dry and secure place the owner can find for it upon his own person.

Willoughby was already bushman enough to recollect his portion of the duties, when he saw his companion busy in kindling a fire and gathering the fuel; and, by the time the sticks were blazing, the two quart pots were filled, ready to be placed in front of the fire on the windward side. In ten minutes more might be seen the Australian (who felt, to a certain extent, bound to enact the part of head-cook, in consideration of the less inferior proficiency of his fellow-traveller), sitting tailor-fashion in front of the fire, watching intently for the full bubble of the water, and directly it showed itself, dropping carefully into the pot a capacious handful of tea. The click of the opening pocket-knives followed, and the meal was begun: the dogs standing round imploring, as earnestly and appealingly as they can by silence and steadfast gazing, their share of their master's provision.

For a couple of hours the bushmen rested and refreshed themselves: the hearty meal, the pipe, and a yarn soon while away so much time beneath a shady tree of a hot day. Whilst Willoughby tied up the bags, and refastened all to the saddles, Reuben Kable took his whip, and walked round the cattle, turning them along the road. Revived by their rest and feed, men, and horses, and dogs, now went on at a lively pace for the range. By sun-down it was passed, upwards of twelve miles further on the whole accomplished, and the 'mob' safely paddocked for the night.

Having now given the reader a sufficient sketch of the customs of stock-driving, it would be wearisome to follow the travellers step by step. On the road to Manaroo Plains, a stock-yard or paddock may be secured for the safe custody of the drove every night; but on the tracts to the far out districts in some directions the driver is compelled occasionally to camp in the bush, and watch the cattle all night. In such cases, however, there is generally a second hand, and the night is divided in two watches between them. Several fires are sometimes lit at the mouth of a ravine, girt round by rocks too steep to be scaled by the cattle, and the drivers sleep by the fires, encompassed by their dogs; the beasts are then as secure as if in a yard. So much trouble is involved in the recovery of cattle which stray away on a journey,

far from their own run or grazing ground, that stockmen omit no precaution or vigilance to prevent it. The beasts generally make back, in course of time to their own run; but they return very leisurely—sometimes taking six weeks in traversing homewards only as much ground as they were driven over in as many days; never taking the road, but wandering through all the green spots they can find adjacent to their route; luxuriating for a couple of days in a retired grassy plat here, then crossing a range, and lingering awhile in some rich secluded nook at its base; and so on to the end of their progress homeward.

Reuben Kable's object in removing his herd, was partly to rescue them from the wild condition into which they had got, through running amongst a labyrinth of mountains quite inaccessible in many places to the horseman, and partly to remove them to good pasturage, from a locality which the bush fires of the past season had left almost without a blade of grass. The tract of country he was going to is a vast plain, retaining the aboriginal appellation of Manaroo, and is considered to contain some of the best grazing grounds for horned cattle within the Australian colonies. A rough idea of its situation may be given by observing that it occupies the extreme point of the eastern line of coast; and thus lies coastwise between the eastern and southern settlements. Far above the sea, and utterly bare of forest, over its main expanse, its winter is piercing and desolate. Its extent is such, that in some parts a rider may tire a good horse two days in succession in passing across from bush to bush But in places, long narrow points of straggling forest stretch out far into the open waste, strangely bewildering the traveller, and rendering the attempt to traverse the ground in foggy weather very dangerous to the inexperienced. Additional peril also arises from the inequality of the ground. No ranges of importance intersect its surface to serve as landmarks at a distance; but irregular hollows of various depth, and little lines of elevated surface no less irregular, present themselves in all directions.

Toward the evening of the fifth day, Reuben Kable suddenly pointed out to his companion the termination of their journey. It was a lonely hut, in the depth of the horse-shoe bight they had just entered. From the belt of forest they had passed to that on the opposite side of the bight seemed little more than a stone's throw, though the actual distance was about three miles. The hut itself looked like a toy: the capacious stockyard behind was discernible; but the place did not suggest the idea of a cattle station. The effect of these gigantic plains in this particular is most surprising, especially on the first occasion that the eye is subjected to their enchantment. About another hour brought the wearied men and horses to the little bark hut; the jaded cattle being left to mingle with a few of their new associates, which were grazing with sleek hides and plump carcases by the big waterhole at the foot of one of the more prominent elevations on the line of the bight. The stockman and hutkeeper were both out, and half a dozen kangaroo dogs came hastily from various quarters to

dispute the entrance of the hut with its master; but presently, as one and another recognised him, they changed their barks of defiance into antics and yelps of welcome.

The inhabitant of a town may in some degree imagine the sense of enjoyment which is experienced by the bushman on reaching his own hut in a distant part of the country, after one of these protracted and harassing journeys; but he will still remain ignorant of the delight which is felt on rising next morning after a night's rest, and looking abroad with a feeling that you have now "free foot in the wilderness:" that your next door neighbour will not complain of your trespassing on him, if you do but circumscribe your operations within a circle of ten miles in diameter. Reuben, however, delayed his friend no longer than the two days necessary for refreshing the horses, before he intimated that he was ready to fufil his promise.

The tier of the Australian Alps, or, as they are called in the common parlance of the country, the Warragong Mountains, lay now about midway between them and the tract of land, or rather the station known as the Rocky Springs; and a couple of days' ride when the horses were fresh, was sufficient for reaching the spot. The assistance of a black, however, was requisite to make sure of the most practicable pass through the ranges; and one was soon found, and mounted on the stockkeeper's spare horse. Once more the young men set out together, with a feeling of familiarity approaching almost to that of brotherhood, and an hourly increasing sympathy: frankness and fearlessness were main elements in the character of both.

The weather continued as it had been for some weeks, till the evening of the day on which they set out; when one of those sudden and complete changes in the state of the atmosphere took place, to which the whole of this elevated region (particularly at this part) is so subject. As they turned the crown of the gap, up which they had made their way, the black fellow suddenly quickened his pace, with the exclamation, "Murry* make haste! I believe murry tograt† directly." His countryman reined round his horse and cast his eye down the ravine. "He's right, Willoughby; here's a regular fog coming up the gullies as fast as it can sweep: these fogs will soak one through in about an hour as bad as being run through a waterhole. Well, it's no odds: we can't get away from it." Willoughby now turned and looked downward toward the plains. Every object was hidden; the whole of the immense expanse was one rolling sea of mist. Before they could withdraw their eyes from the magnificent spectacle, the deluge of vapour was scaling point after point of the mountain, until it rose in volumes up the very ravine at the brink of which they stood, and moving with the speed of steam, was over them, around them, and far away beyond them, in a few seconds. Almost in an instant, too, it was

* Very. † Cold.

at its thickest: not a tree could be seen at twenty feet distant, and the whole of the air around was one wide-spread extent of moving motes of spray.

"Now, Joe the Marine," said the Australian, addressing his black countryman by his standing title among the whites, "mind you don't take the wrong gully down the mountain."

"Oh, baal (*not*) me stupid, Misser Kable," said the black fellow. "What for you pialla (*talk*) like that?"

"Well, push along: it'll be no joke to camp on the mountain in this fog."

The guide did as he was urged. The road was devious, and in many places precipitous; but he pursued his course with all the unerring instinct of savage life. Before the darkness had established itself amongst the more dense timber of the mountain, the party had issued into the scantier bush and longer lingering light of the low grounds. The black immediately struck across to intersect a road, which soon conducted them once more to a station. Here the horses were hobbled and turned out, and the riders wore soon sharing with the stockman and his hut-keeper the ever-welcome pot of tea, and some cold corned beef and damper.

A light rain fell next morning; but it was too trivial to be allowed to impede their progress. About the middle of the afternoon, Willoughby remarked that it was beginning to come down more and more heavily, and bade fair for an evening and night of heavy rain. Reuben, who had now taken the lead as guide, directed his attention to the mouth of a gully towards which they were advancing, and replied,—"About a mile and a half will bring us to the station; where we shall be sure of dry house-room and plenty to eat, if it rains for a week."

A few faint horse-tracks were here and there visible, as they walked their horses up the sharply rising hollow; but there was nothing like the token of traffic to a much or long inhabited spot. Willoughby perceived that they had turned directly into one of the larger ranges of the lowlands; and about half an hour elapsed before they reached the crown of the ridge, where it was lowest: a spot known in bush language as "a gap." These gaps, or low points of the ridges, are of course taken advantage of, whenever practicable, for crossing a range of hills; and the gap is attained by following up to it the most gently-sloping level, and otherwise unobstructed gully. Beyond the gap the ground again fell, but with an easy declivity: the main line of it was covered by a swamp; so that the horsemen had to keep the edge of the space, where the sapling timber again almost barred their passage. At length, between forcing their way by main strength through the sapling scrub, and jumping the dead trees that lay fallen in all directions athwart the swamp, the horses made good their way to the bottom. Here the spurs that ran down from the leading ridge, and betwixt two of which was contained the swamp they had followed, terminated in open ground. The Australian rode briskly up on to the hip of the one on the right, and there check-

ing his horse, and facing him toward the clear expanse of the flat in front, awaited the approach of Willoughby.

"Will that do?" he asked; "is that anything like what you want? Here you have a mountain full of good timber at your back; yonder in front, is just such another range at about half a mile off; and down below, in the flat, runs a creek that might be called a little river, never dry; it comes out of a large semicircle of crags a little higher up to the left, which is the reason the station goes by the name of 'the Rocky Springs;' and all the low ground through which it runs, in front of us, is clear of trees, you see, for half a mile above us, and more than as far below. Upwards there, to the left, the clear ground changes only into fine open forest, with scarcely a tree to the acre; and downwards, to the right, the creek sweeps on, round the point of the hills yonder, through large open flats to the Morrumbidgee. It's what I call a first-rate farm for a new settler. Now! six paces further over the hip of the hill. There! what do you say to that for a flat for cultivation? A complete bay, you see, between this spur of the range and the next: I should think there is a good fifty acres; and that's cultivation ground enough for any new settler. Yonder is the hut: master and men, I believe, all mess togother; but it's a good big one. It will serve you till you get up another, at all events. And that other hill where the hut is, you see is a bald hill with a fine broad easy face: just the very spot for a good house by-and-bye: only, for the life of you, if you ever want me to find my way to it when I am out in this part, don't do as I have known two or three nobs do, lay out carriage-roads to the site of the future mansion before you've got so much as a good slab-hut or a donkey-cart."

There is nothing that causes us to realize the presence and power of a strong practical mind like its achieving, in our very sight, a sound and able project. From this time Willoughby Bracton, though by no means inferior in ability on his own more perilous element, felt an irresistible attraction for Reuben's character: how finally to result will be seen hereafter. As no flattery of thanks was required, so few, simple, and sincere were those that were rendered.

The young men made their way down and across the flat, where, as yet, only a few acres were fenced off for agriculture; and once more received the cheerful hospitalities of a bush hut. The owner was absent, and the man in charge was unable to say when he was likely to return from Port Philip district, whither he had proceeded with the main body of his horned cattle. The next day they once more rode off in company; parting, where their roads diverged, with mutual regret; and not till Willoughby had given his promise to make a trip to Broken Bay immediately the affairs of his own family were auspiciously arranged.

Reuben Kable returned to his stock-station at Manaroo, for the purpose of branding his unbranded cattle, and regulating such other portions of his affairs as needed his attention. Willoughby

Bracton pursued his journey to Sydney; and it will be conjectured rightly that his report of the station at "the Rocky Springs" was such, that by the middle of the following month his father had completed the purchase.

CHAPTER III.

Preparations for taking possession of the farm—Hiring hands—Martin Beck, the overseer.

THE tide seemed turned; and Lieutenant Bracton gave himself up to agreeable prognostications. One thing only was annoying; that he should have landed at Port Philip instead of at Sydney, in the first instance: not so much on account of the little additional trouble and expense, however, as because the beloved sex are apt to be a little intolerant on the point of a change of projects. Unacquainted, by the wearing experience which man undergoes, of the perpetually fresh phases that the business world puts on, they are apt to be disturbed if informed that arrangements which they had set down as permanently settled must be varied: they suppose that the strength of the husband, the father, the brother, can always go straight forward on the prescribed track, whatever the obstacles. It is a pretty superstition, however, and to be favoured whenever it may be prudently done.

In the present case, happily, the apprehension of reproof was not a very heavy one. Mrs. Bracton, if faulty in personal character at all, was so only in being more mild and unassuming than it is altogether desirable that the mother of a family should be. Her niece, Katharine, was also one of nature's happiest efforts to embody an elegant, affectionate, and virtuous womanhood. If the old sea-officer stood at all in fear, it was of his little daughter Marianna; who, being the only daughter, and never deposed by any subsequent claimant from her father's knee, had earned for herself the title of "the spoilt one." But this is all we have to say in impeachment of her claim to everybody's love. Where is the girl that is not lovely at sweet sixteen? Marianna was lovely, not merely because she was sixteen; she was lovely in person, in spirit, and in character. Though not so tall as Katharine, she was of a good height for woman; slim, but rounded in the most generous mould; and a thousand blushes suffused her countenance every day she walked amongst men. Quick in apprehension and thought, with intense susceptibilities and refined taste, she was high and passionate of heart; loving, and, when fit time was, proud—proud as her sire himself had been, and would have fought a ship as well as he, if she had possessed the requisite title to wear the epaulettes.

Meantime, whilst it must be acknowledged that Lieutenant Bracton occasionally felt little twinges of apprehension as to the

reception of this sudden alteration of his plan, let it not be supposed that he had forgotten the magic power of those small, but endearing words "pet," "darling," &c.—words without which our language would be very imperfect: he remembered right well what thousand troubles they had brought him through, betwixt boyhood and grey hairs; and, quietly smiling to himself, was at ease about the matter of "the Rocky Springs."

Willoughby never thought about the point at all: brothers are allowed to be impenetrable to this sort of grievances. Matters of more importance, moreover, now required his attention; and he found that his father's naval habits did not constitute him the most efficient coadjutor in the business in hand. Although much of the *tout ensemble* of the naval officer had worn off the old gentleman during the eight years he had resided on shore, he had acquired no other rural characteristics beyond what we have attributed to his outward appearance: the corners of the flint were worn off, but it could not become a sandstone.

The purchase and transfer of the title to the land completed, the next step was that of hiring such servants as were necessary, and buying a team of bullocks and dray for the conveyance of stores and luggage. Few horse teams, comparatively, are worked on the Australian roads; and the common English waggon also is rarely seen. The conveyance for dead weight —and such is almost all that passes through the country—downwards, of wool, grain, cheese, and butter: upwards, of tea and sugar, furniture, clothing, and similar articles—is almost invariably the dray, a vehicle very similar in construction to our brewers' drays in England, but built somewhat lighter. At times, drays are to be procured in Sydney, at public auctions, considerably below the cost price; and the land-agent advised Willoughby to wait a few days for a sale of farm-stock in the suburbs, which was about to take place.

The servants required were an overseer, a carpenter, a bullock-driver, and three or four labouring hands; these it was decided to secure in the capital, and send on to the farm with the dray: any additional labourers were always procurable on the spot. The labouring population of Australia is almost wholly migratory: individuals rarely attach themselves to one locality, but, at the termination of the periods for which they hire, wander away to some distant district, or to some neighbouring settler's farm either on a plea of discontent, or from the desire of change, and, as they say, "to see the country."

Lieutenant Bracton accordingly inserted in one of the papers the common advertisement of a new settler, for so many and such hands. The first that appeared in consequence was a fine and rather handsome young man of American-negro descent, named Martin Beck, who came to offer his services as carpenter. His appearance was much superior to that usual among persons of the same occupation: a peculiarity probably attributable to the circumstance of his being a native of the colony: his mother and

father were both convicts, who had been sent hither in the first days of the colony, from different parts of the British Islands: both blacks of American birth, they had married by permission of the governor, whilst still under sentence. It was usual, in former times, to give well-behaved persons of the prison class, under such circumstances, a free grant of fifty or a hundred acres, together with twelve or eighteen months' ration from the public store to begin with; and the practice has left an attestation of its excellence, in the confirmed reformation and gradual advancement of the parties and their families, in at least four cases out of five. If the result in the one instance which now comes under our more direct observation is an exception to the general rule, an amply sufficient reason may be traced in the isolation effected by colour. As Martin Beck grew up, with all the fire of Africa in his veins, he became painfully sensible that he was an alien in his native land. The girls of his country were growing up around him, amidst forest and mountain and river, full of a winning softness rarely met with in the offspring of cities: but none among them for him. For him there was no more from the most kind and considerate lass than a nod of good-humoured condescension, and a "Fine day, Martin: how's your father? how's the old woman?" His attention to his dress, which was much superior to that of other natives of the same rank, intimated clearly that he was quite aware that colour alone was depriving him of the advantage of a fine and even, in some degree, noble person. He wore a blue jacket, with black waistcoat and trousers, of the best material, and evidently the work of one of the first shops in Sydney; black silk handkerchief, white shirt, and Manilla hat; and his boots were always well polished: quite an extraordinary thing for those of his occupation and position in the colony. Although there was something sinister in the countenance of Martin Beck, it was not that expression which low vices imprint: there was no trace of habitual debauchery of any kind. The acute observer, watching his face for some time, would have perceived a continuous and vigilant endeavour to conceal, under a practised laugh, unbounded avidity, and so much of pure selfishness as the ineradicable instincts of youth render possible. His English was as good as an Englishman's—indeed, but for being intermingled with the idioms of the colony, better than is usually heard among our mechanics at home.

He introduced himself by walking boldly up to Lieutenant Bracton, as he stood at the door of the Royal Hotel, in George-street, and saying, as he slightly raised his hat, "I hear you want a carpenter, captain."

"Yes, my man," said Mr. Bracton. "But what are you? You appear an American: not run away from a ship, I hope?"

"Oh, no, sir; I am a native of the Derwent."

"Surely not one of the aborigines: not one of the bush natives?"

"My parents were Yankees," said the black, with his habitual

and instinctive endeavour to sustain in his own mind, by a false definition, his propinquity to a civilized people.

"Oh, I see," said Lieutenant Bracton, "Your father and mother were coloured natives of America, and came to Van Diemen's Lane, where you were born."

"Yes. I count myself as good a bushman as there is in the colony, captain. If you are taking a new farm, and we make a bargain, I don't think you'll grumble at the end of the time. I'll hire for six months, or for twelve; or I'll take the work by the piece, or any way you like: only, as I expect to do my work, and can do it as it ought to be done, I must have good wages."

"Well, my man, I'll think about you," said the lieutenant. "Who have you worked for in the colony?"

"I'm but just come up from Hobart Town," said Beck, with a slight degree of hesitation: which, through his stammering a little in his common talk, passed unnoticed.

"What wages shall you want?"

"Five shillings a day, hiring by the month (no carpenter that is a carpenter has less), and a month's notice before being discharged, or a month's wages. But I'd sooner take the work by the piece: then I can work what hours I like. Twelve hours is a day's work on wages; but I'd sooner work the other six than sit yarning in a hut with the riff-raff. And it's always better in my opinion for a settler to pay for his work by the piece; then he knows what he pays his money for, and a man knows what he has to do for his wages."

Willoughby Bracton came up at the instant. The fine appearance and evident intelligence of the black had made a favourable impression on the lieutenant: and his son was prepossessed by the sentiment discernible on his father's countenance in Martin's favour.

"This young man," said Lieutenant Bracton, "is a native of the colony by American parents. He wants to hire as carpenter."

"He has the look of a good workman," said Willoughby, after surveying the black for an instant. "I have just met Mr. Moody (the gentleman of whom Lieutenant Bracton had purchased his land) on the wharf. He came up from Port Philip by the vessel that was signalled last night: she put in there. She is the Nautilus, of London. I was telling him we are only waiting for a dray, and he has made me an offer of his, which is down in Sydney for stores for the farm, and will not now be wanted: I can have it, if we can agree about the price. He says it is quite a new dray, and there is a team of seven bullocks also,—a shafter, and three pair of yoke oxen."

"You had better lay hold of that offer, captain," suggested Martin Beck, "even if you give a little more. There's nothing like having a team that's used to a run; they don't stray: you can get them when you want them. If you take up new bullocks, half your bullock-driver's time will be spent for months in looking after them, till they get used to the run."

"That's true," said Willoughby; "and it seems to me that it

is almost as necessary to have the same driver as to have the bullocks."

"It all depends," replied Martin, "on whether he is a good driver. A fresh driver, if he's a good hand, will soon get used to his team, and they to him; but if he's a bad one, the sooner he has done with them the better. As for a bullock-driver knowing the run, it's of very little consequence; a fortnight will put all that to rights. The best thing to do, sir, is to get out of his master whether he's worth anything, before you make the bargain for the team; and if he is, then offer to buy the team on condition of the man going with them. If he's a free man, his master can give him up his agreement; and if he's a prisoner, the master can lend him, if he likes: it's not allowed, I suppose; but nobody cares about that. Nobody need 'jacket' (*inform against*) himself."

"You seem to have a good knowledge of these matters, carpenter," said the lieutenant; "you can go and look at the dray and team for us, and tell us what it is worth. I dare say we shall engage you."

The black raised his hat slightly, and observing that the father and son turned aside to talk together, walked to a little distance.

"You've got a man there," said Willoughby to his father, "much better fitted for an overseer, in my opinion, than some raw countryman just come from England."

"He certainly seems a very intelligent fellow, and I have no doubt is well acquainted with all that has to be done on a new farm. We'll hear what he has to say.—Here, my man, step this way—I did not ask your name yet."

"My name is Martin Beck, captain," answered the black, with that slight hesitation of speech which had before insinuated itself into one of his replies: but his habitual stammer prevented it from attracting any special notice.

"Are you capable of acting as overseer on a farm?" inquired Willoughby.

"In respect of the work," replied Martin, "I consider I could take charge of the largest farm in the country: but I am no scholar."

"I don't see," observed the lieutenant to his son, "that that is of any consequence; we shall have so few men, that there will be no accounts to keep for a long time. You think, Beck, you could answer for managing the business of the farm in the best way?"

"I'm sure of that, captain," replied the black; the misshapen composition of his internal character appearing more distinctly on his features than it had hitherto done, as the vague prospective of greater opportunity arose before him. But the black countenance is only partially amenable to the scutiny of the white man's eye. It might fairly be taken to be only a rude zeal, arising in contemplation of a benefit about to be conferred, that gave Martin Beck's countenance for a few seconds the sharp and eager look which it put on; especially as it was immediately followed by an expression of the almost opposite feeling of unwillingness to accept the proffer.

"I think I shall fancy the work best," he said. "I know I'm one of the best bushmen in the colony, captain. I can do every part of the work that is to be done with a piece of wood; judge the best timber as it stands in the bush; fell it, cut it up, and turn it to any use, from a shearing-shed floor to a panel-door or Venetian blinds. I consider an overseer's berth wouldn't pay me. I'm not afraid of work; and if I work I can earn twice, if not three times, over what an overseer gets."

The statement was too clear to need any explanation, and too reasonable to admit of being questioned; while it made still more obvious both the intelligence and the thrifty habits of the man. And coming as these all did, along with his smart and well-dressed exterior, it would have been an unnatural exercise of caution, if Lieutenant Bracton and his son had not begun to accord him a considerable degree of confidence. The lieutenant, in particular, looking at him with the eye of a naval officer, felt more disposed to secure him in his service than any other man he had yet cast his eyes on in traversing the country. To Willoughby, also, there seemed a sort of incongruity in having a shrewd, experienced native of the colony on the farm, under some such stupid, crawling pretender as he had seen in many places invested with the office of overseer. After a few minutes' thought, he said, turning to Martin Beck,—

"Suppose we agree with you by the job, for such work as we find we want done as we go on, at the current rate given by the nearest settlers; and give you in addition to what you earn thus,—twenty pounds a year for the time you occupy from your own work in superintending things generally. That, you know, is a third of a full salary of an overseer; and you will not lose more than a third of your time in the duties."

"That'll do, sir," said the black, in an instant. "Am I to take the agreement to be made?"

This was assented to: his employers only stipulating that it should be a six months' agreement merely; that they might have the opportunity of terminating or renewing it, according as they found it suit them at the end of that period.

"When do you want me to start, captain?" inquired the black.

"As soon as the dray and the rest of the men are procured," was the reply.

"That may be to-day," said Beck, "if you can find the owner of the dray again. The men I can hunt up for you in two hours."

"Why, I thought," observed the lieutenant, "that labouring men were so scarce here."

"Not in Sydney," said Beck. There's always a mob here who have come down the country to spend their money; and when its gone they must be off. There's only one turnpike gate for the interior: just walk out and stop there a couple of hours, and you'll have the pick of a score every day: shepherds, tradesmen, and men that never were men yet; good men and crawlers. I never want to look at a man twice to know what he is."

"And do you think, Martin," asked Lieutenant Bracton, "that

out of such a crew as that, you can get good men; such men as I want?"

"Working hands are working hands, up the country or down," replied the black. "The only difference I can see is, that everywhere there are some who are emigrants, and some who are freedmen: the emigrants are flats, and the others are sharps. Of the two, I think the sharps are a great deal best worth their wages; they want good looking after, but there's something to be got out of them. The emigrants they send over here always seem more dead than alive, till they've been five or six years in the country; then they begin to be like the rest of the people."

"I don't want," said the lieutenant, rather peremptorily, "to make a station for a den of thieves."

"There's no need for that, captain," said Beck, with a slight discomposure. "The convicts, after they get free, are generally honest enough. In fact, there's nothing for them to steal, unless they break into a settler's stores; and that is not worth their while, for what they would get. Nine out of ten of the freed-men, or more than that, have set it down that honesty is the easiest game." And here the black fell again into the hesitating utterance already mentioned: but it appeared rather an attempt to overcome his stammering by a more deliberate pronunciation of the words, so regularly were they measured, than the result of any inward confusion.

"At all events," said Willoughby, speaking to his father, "the dray might be off to-morrow. Some stores will be required, however. What is it customary to take up to a new station, Martin? There is a large rough hut already on the ground."

Martin Beck proceeded to name the customary provision made, "If the team is a strong one, sir," he said, addressing Willoughby as the party it appeared he was now to deal principally with, "it will save a journey to Sydney and back in the middle of winter, when the rivers will very likely be up, if you take six months' stores at once. How many hands will there be in all?"

"Five of ourselves," was Willoughby's reply. "And now I think of it, lest I should not recollect it again, the first thing you do, must be to divide that hut off; leaving half as it is, and turning the other half into two small rooms, boarded all round as close as you can fit the boards, for my mother and sisters. And then, if you have time, run up two small huts towards the end of the hill; one of them for yourself and me, and one of them for the men."

"Very good, sir," said Beck. "You asked about stores. Five of your own family, you say: how many besides?"

"Yourself, the bullock-driver, and three labouring hands. You can find them and bring them here in the course of the day."

"Ten in all:—about four hundred weight of sugar; a chest, or chest and half of tea; fifty or sixty pounds of tobacco (every man almost smokes, captain, here). As to beef, I suppose you mean to buy that, standing, up the country. The quantity of

pounds of flour, some ten. Then there are tools and slop-clothing, and nails, and cooking utensils, and a number of other things."

The detail had already bewildered the parties to whom it was addressed, so far, that Willoughby inquired if a list of the usual supplies for a new station could not be procured. In reply, Martin Beck said that he should wish to select for himself, from an ironmonger's store, such implements as were necessary in his own duties and for the business of the farm; and that for the rations and stores at large, it was the common and easiest way to give the usual order to some one of the dealers in general merchandise with which the city abounds. That plan therefore was adopted. Martin Beck received an order to one of the large ironmongers to allow him to select for Lieutenant Bracton whatever goods he thought proper, together with authority to choose and bring for approval the necessary men; and Willoughby proceeded to give instructions to one of the general agents to prepare the stores.

CHAPTER IV.

Starting of the party—The dray bogged—John Thomas, the bullock-driver—A visit from the natives—Finishing the hut.

MARTIN BECK'S task was well and promptly performed. That night, three able, decent, and serviceable men were brought to his employer and hired. Any other than a sea-officer might have been surprised to hear from each of them in succession a request for "an advance;" but it was such a well-known custom of the lieutenant's own profession that it occasioned no surprise. Almost invariably the part of the population that have been convicts seem only to earn that they may spend their money again in thoughtless extravagance. Many no doubt would do otherwise if the sale of small parcels of land was customary; for those who, through the considerate benevolence of some old master, have the opportunity of running a few head of cattle on his land, are often found making that investment of their wages. The generality, however, having no such facility for turning their earnings into property, and unable to resist the extraordinary temptation to dissipation from a large amount of ready cash in their pockets, soon make away with the proceeds of their labour. The capital and its amusing scenes is naturally chosen for the "spree," in preference to the solitary bush public-house; and hence the daily file of penniless stragglers which Martin Beck had spoken of, as capable of furnishing in a couple of hours as many good men as were required. Every labouring man proceeding to the interior passes out of the city by the turnpike; and nine out of every ten go out with empty pockets: or, at the best, with no more than sufficient

to carry them so far on the road as where the more hospitable habits of the interior commence.

Willoughby was also successful in arranging for the purchase of the dray and bullocks, provided his overseer considered the stipulated price a fair one. Beck, on viewing them, decided that nothing of equal value could be got for less, except by unusual accident. The bullock-driver turned out to be a ticket-of-leave man; that is, a prisoner who has served a sort of punitory portion of his sentence, and having done so without serious misconduct has entered upon what may be described as a probationary period, during which he holds an official document authorizing him to work for his own advantage within a prescribed district. The man in question, holding his ticket already for the district in which "the Rocky Springs" was situated, although engaged for twelve months, could not be compelled to accompany his master anywhere beyond it, except as a mere driver actually on a journey; and being still a prisoner, could not, even if willing, go with him to Port Philip. He therefore naturally chose to pass along with his team into the service of Mr. Bracton. His master gave him a high character for trustworthiness; but added, "You must let him have his own way with his bullocks. He's a Welshman very faithful, to be depended upon in anything; but as obstinate as a mule."

Next day by noon, the dray was laden with its tools, and stores and rations, for the journey; and the three "advances" had probably been sent by various publicans to be set to their account at one of the banks. The party about to proceed to the hut under Diandulla Mountain, slowly but steadily began to wend its way over the hot, red, dusty hills out of Sydney towards the interior; by the road on which, some sixty miles further forward, Lieutenant Bracton and his son had encountered their friendly adviser.

The emigrant to a new country, if he have any taste for active life, will generally meet with plenty to gratify it in the necessity for action which is perpetually imposed upon him by the motion of things around; especially during the earlier stages of his undertaking. The late proprietor of the farm called on Lieutenant Bracton in the course of the same day, offering him for purchase, as a convenience to both parties, a small number of cattle still upon the farm; amongst which were some of his best milch cows, reserved in case the ground was not disposed of. The offer being accepted, and the price fixed, it was necessary that some one should be there to receive them and give an acquittance; but as Mr. Moody proceeded by Port Philip by an early vessel, and thence on horseback, he expected to be there long before the overseer and dray. The young man, therefore, had once more to determine on an almost immediate journey into the interior. His father chose to proceed by the same vessel with Mr. Moody, to rejoin his family at Port Philip.

It was now the month of April, one of the seasons at which the colony is often visited by very inclement weather. Before Willoughby's

preparations for his journey were completed, heavy rain set in, which continued without intermission for several days; but, unwilling to fail in his appointment, he at length set out. The road traverses many a high, exposed hill and open tract of ground, rendering the journey itself in such weather far from a pleasant one. But the most unwelcome part of his expedition arose from the condition of the roads. Excellent in summer, from the scientific care with which they have been marked out and laid down, they had as yet acquired no solidity from age; and teams were to be seen camped in several places, from want of force of bullocks to overcome the additional difficulty of draught caused by the settled rain. On arriving at Lupton's Inn, however, he had the satisfaction of learning that his party were on ahead, having passed the day before; and after dinner he once more started for the twenty-mile stage that would complete a third part of his journey.

He now hoped to find the party camped, as usual, somewhere on the roadside, towards the end of his own day's stage: they would then be past the worst portion of their journey. Leading up from the further edge of Mittagong flats, where Reuben Kable had refreshed his cattle at noon on the day that Willoughby became his fellow-traveller, a great range of mountain rises, known as the Mittagong range. The ascent of the road is not regular and even throughout, but rather over a series of steppes alternating with declivities. The drainage from the declivities falls and rests on the intermediate level spaces, the upper soil of which is only the light sediment thus accumulated from the water through ages past; those spaces, therefore, though level, are the worst parts of the whole ascent. The drays in wet seasons bog up to the axle; sometimes one wheel going right down suddenly, sometimes both; whilst the poor animals themselves, in their efforts to force their way forward, only drive down their feet deeper into the marshy soil, and flounder about till their hearts fail them, and they give up the struggle. Once fairly baffled in this way, even a good set of bullocks will refuse to pull again.

To the young settler's dismay, such was the predicament in which he found his own team, as he rode up the range. The evening was fast setting in, the rain falling thick and cold, and the wind, which had blown fresh in the low grounds, blowing still more boisterous and dismal on this bleak elevation; the dray was stuck in the centre of a bog, down nearly to the axle, and the ground cut up in all directions in the struggle to get it out; the bullocks were standing a little way off in the bush, all huddled together in their yokes, and hanging their heads, knocked up and baffled; the men sitting on the dead logs by the road-side. The straightforward self-dependence and obstinacy of the Welshman, as might easily have been foreseen, was in full antagonism with the assumption and conceited forwardness of Beck; and the feud was fairly begun, which was to take so wide a latitude, and produce such serious consequences before it came to an end: it had been burning with growing but smothered activity from the

first hour the men came into contact; now it was in unconcealed blaze.

"Come," said Beck, shortly before Willoughby rode up; "don't keep us here all night. Try the bullocks again."

"It 'ood be a good job for you to earn your dinner as well as the poor beasts has, my man," retorted the Welshman. There was then a short pause; when one of the hands Beck had procured walked over to him and said something in an under tone. "Ay," replied Beck aloud, "he'll pitch it that he's careful about the captain's cattle, when it's only his own surly temper."

At this juncture, Willoughby came in sight, and, slackening his pace as he perceived the disaster, rode over towards the overseer, who was standing on one side of the road, whilst the bullock-driver was sitting on a log at the other.

"Why, you're fast enough, Martin," said Willoughby.

"So John Thomas says, sir," replied the overseer; "he knows best whether seven such bullocks as yours are, oughtn't to pull that load about a couple of yards. There's good ground within six feet, and this is the last bad place there is: the top of the range is just round the corner of that bit of scrub."

"Oh, you must have another try, Thomas," said Willoughby, after riding across and examining the ground.

"No," said the Welshman; "I 'ood never flog a bullock when I know the poor beast has done all she can."

Further importunities on the part of Willoughby only led to further and more dogged refusals on the part of the Welshman, interspersed with more bitter gibes on the part of Martin.

John Thomas at length got up, and, throwing down his whip, went over to the dray and began to loosen the ropes ready for unloading. "Come, my man in the blue jacket," he said, as soon as he had rolled off the tarpaulin; "do what you can: it isn't much." Beck, thus summoned, was obliged to join the three men who were waiting to help to unload. This was soon performed, and the cattle once more tried. But in vain: no two of them could be got to pull together; nor did the driver seem to try very hard to make them. Once more he unloosed them from the now empty dray, and began doggedly to take off a couple of sheets of bark, which had been laid under the load, and three or four loose planks that served as additional cross pieces; throwing at the same time the axe to one of the men, and directing him to cut ten or a dozen small saplings, and lay across in front of the wheels, to form a solid course for them to the good ground. Laying the planks under the dray with the bark on them, he then placed himself underneath the hinder part in a crouching posture, and heaved it up by main force, notwithstanding the hold of the mud, and there held it whilst the wheels were blocked up underneath.

Thus extricated, Willoughby left them to pursue their way on to the best camping-place within reach that night. John Thomas and the overseer had no further communication: except when the one chose to give some dictatorial and harassing order, and the

other, to show how much of it he could venture, with safety to his ti cket-of-leave, to set at defiance.

By two more days' ride Willoughby reached the station, before the late owner had arrived. And when the weather cleared, he had an opportunity of taking a more leisurely survey than he yet had done of the future home of his family: and, as he supposed, of himself.

Three days elapsed before Mr. Moody reached his late station; and two more were occupied in searching for and delivering the whole of the cattle. Several other articles, useless to the departing occupant, or too cumbersome to transport, but indispensable to the new residents, were also treated for: the steel-mill for grinding wheat, some sieves, the remainder of a small stack of unthrashed wheat, sundry iron pots, &c., and a light cart used for carrying rations to out-stations; which, as the owner had only the horse he rode with him, it was as convenient to him to get rid of, as it was to his successor to obtain. The man who had been hut-keeping during the absence of Mr. Moody was allowed his choice of going with his old master to the new settlements, or having his agreement given up to him and engaging with the new-comer. As new-comers have the reputation of possessing plenty of money, and expending it freely, he chose the latter. Mr. Moody remained some days, engaged in winding up his various connexions of business with other settlers in that quarter of the country; and when not so engaged, making himself at home with Willoughby.

In the mean time, the dray reached its destination. After the stores were housed, and a day had been spent in resting, Martin Beck began to get his tools in order, and give directions to the men. Willoughby was gratified at hearing a favourable opinion expressed of him by so active and penetrating a man as the late owner of the ground. "That overseer of yours is a smart fellow with his tools," said Mr. Moody; "but a shocking dirty colour: he'll frighten all the cattle off the run."

"It's only the native blacks, sir," said one of the men who was standing by, "that the cattle are afraid of; and I dare say it's more because they're without clothes, than because of their colour. I saw Mr. Beck in the yard among the cattle, and they did not seem more afraid of him than of a white man. He's a good hand among cattle: he roped a young bullock, that he wanted yoked in place of the one that's footsore, after it had hunted the bullock-driver and Warraghi Bill, and everybody else out of the yard."

"Well, that's something," said Mr. Moody: "Warraghi is a bold hand himself among cattle. Still I shouldn't like to meet Mr. Beck of a dark night, myself, among the ranges."

"And are the cattle really frightened at the natives?" inquired Willoughby.

"I imagine not exactly," replied Mr. Moody; "it has always appeared to me more like aversion which they manifest, than fear: they gallop about, and snort and toss their heads. Cattle are very keen of scent, and there is such an insufferable odour

encircling these native blacks, that possibly their antics are only an expression of irritation."

"The natives appear a very degraded race," observed Willoughby.

"About the settlements, they are undoubtedly: but in their primitive state I have always felt inclined to think them far less vicious than the mass of civilized society. In fact, in their primitive state I can observe very little of what we commonly call vice amongst them. The ugliness, too, for which they have such a standing character, assumes only its common proportion among the tribes which remain in their natural condition. Some of the men are as fine samples of frame and muscle as could be found; and I have seen young girls among them with the finest contour and the most brilliant eyes imaginable. But they are old soon after twenty years of age: the glow of their youth, like the day of their clime, seems to pass suddenly away, without a twilight."

So far as the mechanical duties of his overseership went, Martin Beck deserved the encomium he had extorted. Mr. Moody soon afterwards took his leave. There being as yet but the one hut (the late proprietor was a bachelor), common lodging and a common mess were the order of the day. However, in the course of a few days a wandering tribe of natives pitched their camp on the opposite side of the creek. They were what are called "civilized blacks"—one of the tribes who had been for several years in connexion with the Europeans. The young emigrant had thus the fullest opportunity of extending his circle of acquaintance; and, whether he felt it agreeable or not, he must at all events have found it amusing, to come in to his hut and find that, ample as it was, the floor was completely covered every day at dinner-time by his black guests. Half a dozen "gins" with their pickaninnies were crouched in the chimney, not only beside, but even behind the fire. And on every stool, and, where the stools failed, seated cross-legged upon the ground, the sages of the tribe furnished, in some instances, specimens of the most recondite and well-nigh incredible ugliness; whilst outside the door the younger men and boys stood or sprawled on the ground, talking over their own affairs, and seeming rather like an appendage to the visit of the tribe, than personally much interested in it.

This state of things, however, did not last many days. Beck, with a smartness that marked all he did, having first consulted his employer, divided a seven-foot section off from the large hut, and again dividing that into two, with an intermediate passage, lined each of the apartments thus formed with the sound dry bark of the roof—a much more impervious lining than fresh-cut boards, which would soon have shrunk with the heat of the hut, leaving interstices. He also re-covered the roof with new bark cut by the natives. In a few more days he had a sufficient quantity of slabs split, and other bush-stuff ready, for the construction of two common huts, one for the men, and the other for Willoughby Bracton and himself. The hutkeeper who had been taken on was

made stockman, as best knowing the run; one of the hands brought up the country succeeded him as cook; the other two helped Beck in the bush; and Willoughby, tucking up his shirt-sleeves, went as bullock-driver's mate, along with John Thomas.

A special messenger at length arrived from Sydney, bearing a letter from Lieutenant Bracton to his son. The ladies, as Willoughby had expected they would do, had unanimously declared in favour of occupying their bush residence without delay. The expenses they had already incurred amounted to a large sum; "indeed," as Katharine suggested, "to the price of a flock of sheep." Willoughby and his mate, therefore, had to haul in the remainder of the stuff for the huts as speedily as possible. And once more John Thomas set off down the road for a load of luggage, and such articles of furniture as were necessary to render this domestic transition tolerable to the less hardy subjects of it.

CHAPTER V.

Arrival of the ladies at "the Rocky Springs"—A neighbourly visit—Police magistrate—Morgan Brown, the stockman.

MORNING at length came—a bright sunny morning, whose warmth was only chequered—not broken, by the light fluttering airs that blew across the plain, or rather park-like forest, between the township of Ghiagong and Diandullah Mountain—when Willoughby, in his usual straightforward, business way, was seen conveying three ladies in the little green ration-cart towards the Rocky Springs. The elder of them, Mrs. Bracton, was far past middle age, with an expression of intelligence, benevolence, and firmness, on a face not without furrows, but evidently in days gone by a handsome one; her hair was raven black, streaked with a few of silver hairs: and her dress was almost that of a quakeress. Indeed, except for the tasteful bonnet and veil, she might have been mistaken for one, for she was a woman of quiet manners and few words. The youngest of the triad, and who sat beside the driver, was of the earliest age to which the courtesy of the other sex accords the coveted rank of womanhood: she was the elder lady's daughter, Marianna; and her dress was handsome enough for the fashionable streets of London. There was a decision in everything she did and said, that, whilst it partook in no degree of immodesty, indicated a strong personal will. Her companion, whom she frequently turned back to and addressed in a fond and winning tone as "sister," though she was her cousin Katharine, more resembled Mrs. Bracton in external appearance. Her stature was that of a full-grown and graceful woman; her age perhaps twenty, and her dress simple and elegant. The eyes of

Katharine were a rich and placid hazel, in which only the most sound and unwavering health prevented repose from passing into languor; the brows were fine and beautifully arched, and their lashes distinct without being obtrusive. Fine auburn hair hung, like two rich clusters of the grape, on either side of a face without fault in fairness and in form. She spoke but little, any more than Mrs. Bracton, except when Marianna turned towards her those arch grey eyes, and secured her attention. On these occasions, the brief and simple, but just, replies of Katharine, whilst they seemed sometimes to astonish and disconcert Marianna for an instant, were yet uttered with no more than the affectionate and forbearing dignity of a superior.

The ladies had been attended by Lieutenant Bracton to the nearest point to the Rocky Springs made by the mail; from thence the duty of conducting them to their future home was deputed to Willoughby: his father having passed on some distance across the country to inspect a couple of flocks of sheep, for which he was in treaty with one of the large flock-masters.

The attitude and demeanour of the fair exiles portrayed not inadequately their various sentiments in their new circumstances;—Marianna, with her inexhaustible fund of animal spirits and active intelligence, almost losing all sentiment in the novel impressions of the scenes and objects around, and in curiosity as to what might yet meet her gaze; Katharine, timidly declining sympathy with things so strange, but far more happy than any such feeling of interest could make her, in the still rapture of reverie felt by the soul that resigns itself with unflinching trust to the guidance of duty; and Mrs. Bracton, as all her life she had been, ordinary in her thoughts, innocently correct in her purposes, never so much as dreaming that there was any other way to walk in than that where she was in company with her husband and her children. If any faint desire of other than what really existed occasionally flickered before her mind's eye, it was the wish that Katharine would be a little more talkative, and Marianna a little less so: but that, the latter young lady herself, whenever her mother was so unlucky as to express such a wish, insisted was prudery, and felt herself much wronged by the covert imputation.

By this time the occupants of the Rocky Springs had been shown, by the two old hands (the Welshman and the hutkeeper), a way round the point of the lower end of the range, where the creek turned off towards the Morrumbidgee. Along this road, not known to Reuben Kable, Willoughby now approached the station. The journey from Ghiagong had been across all the ups and downs of the grassy surface of the bush: for as yet, though that was the nearest township, no other way-marks assisted the traveller to his course than three or four faint dray-tracks in the green sward; and, where those failed, occasionally a sight of the distant mountain, behind which the farm was situated. The horse being fagged (for in bush-driving one has to go over many logs and even fallen trees) with the weight of the travellers, and

the portion of their luggage that was indispensable to them, was suffered to walk at his ease up the creek side and round the point of the bald hill, which Reuben Kable had indicated as a good site for a house. As they passed along its base at a few yards distant, Willoughby pointed it out, adding the comment of his friend. The gaze of Mrs. Bracton turned with more interest than any she had yet shown for the surrounding scenery, and even with a different interest from any she had yet felt, towards the object pointed out. Marianna glanced at it, and remarked, "We have come all this way to enjoy a rural habitation, and such we will now have." But Willoughby had spoken with so much enthusiasm of his Australian friend, that Katharine, if she did no more, wondered whether this friend of Willoughby's, with the Quaker-like name, and the sound judgment which had assisted them so materially at a perplexing crisis, possessed also the corresponding simplicity of character, so intimate in its connexion with moral rectitude. The consequence was, that the little green cart was at the hut door before Katharine was sensible of any further features of the locality.

The hut before which they now stood lay deep in the nook: indeed, nearly at the extremity of its lower side, and a little way up the acclivity of the hill, on a natural flat. One spur of the mountain rose higher and higher from the spot, running gradually to the height of the main range; but, in the opposite direction, falling gradually down to the low, round, bald point they had passed by, and so down into the plain. In front of them, a similar and parallel spur ran in like manner from the ridge of the main mountain down to within about the same distance of the creek; whose waters rolled deep, and rapid, and flashing in the sunbeams along in front of the nook, at some fifty paces from the points of the hills. The nook or bight itself, thus formed by the two spurs from the mountain, contained about fifty acres; of these about ten or a dozen at its inner end were fenced off, by a line of rails running from one hill directly across to the other, and were still covered with the stubble of the last crop. The remainder of the bight was still under grass, kept close cropped by the home cattle; and, stimulated by the late varied weather, it was now covered with the bright green of the rapid vegetation of the climate. Beyond the stream, the open and somewhat melancholy plain wore the russet hue of the ripened herbage, rather than that of the new that was shooting up amongst it. And beyond the plain again another mountain rose, terminating the prospect: here, exhibiting trees of glorious verdure; there, with the sunlight sleeping on its bare bosom; in some places showing great faces of square crag, and again in others the dark mouths of the ravines.

The hut itself was constructed of rough, upright slabs of split timber, about seven feet high, roofed with bark, and covering an area of about twenty feet in length by fourteen in width, with the door in the middle of one of the longer sides, and the chimney in

the middle of one of the shorter: or rather the chimney, which was merely an enclosure slabbed similarly to the hut itself, occupied nearly the whole of one end—that next to the main range. All round it the ground was bare with the constant tread of man and beast. About forty or fifty yards lower down, towards the creek, were to be seen the two smaller new huts just put up; and still nearer to the bald point of the hill a strong and extensive stockyard, or inclosure of six-rail fence for confining cattle.

The lively curiosity of the sex soon, however, turned to the more grave task of exploring the interior of their habitation. As yet there was no more than the economical and enduring floor which the first family of our race in their ignorance supposed was all there needed to be. The hut door opened into a good-sized room, at the further end of which a three-log fire blazed merrily, and none the less so that the sky had begun to get cloudy and the wind chill; but another door in a partition which ran across the hut opened into a little passage, on either hand of which were the apartments that Willoughby had had so carefully constructed for the elder and younger ladies respectively. There was no other window than an opening through the slabs, like a ship's port, but provided with a wodden shutter, fastening on the inside. Marianna, at the first glimpse, drew back; a slight shadow supplanting the usual vivacity of her countenance. Katharine completed her survey with an evident increase of cheerfulness, as if she had become relieved of that vague apprehension which clear but timid minds have of the indefinite.

The ladies made their first meal in the prevailing fashion of the bush, paying their host many compliments on the felicity with which he performed the services of the buttery. After their repast, Willoughby escaped the waggery of his standing tormentor by carrying off his pilot-coat, and other personal property, to his own hut, but not without inviting himself to return to tea; at which meal it may be supposed that no surprise he could feel, or even feign, would be thought unearned by the fair reformers. All the tin pots were ranged upside down in a solid square in the darkest corner of the hut; and a favourite co-emigrant cat was teaching her kittens to lap milk out of the best tin meat-dish. There was wood on the fire, certainly; but it looked as if it had been fetched out of the bush with a pair of parlour-tongs; whilst outside old Cæsar, the bull-dog, stood a wary distance off, on legs like four posts, stretching out his head one way and his tail the other, with his eyes fixed on the door, which was now shut in his face for the first time within his remembrance, as if he were resolved to look through it. Meantime, crockery and glass, eau de Cologne and scented pocket-handkerchiefs, hair-pins and toirtoiseshell combs, India shawls, furred mantles, and small aprons almost triangular, were to be seen in all directions, looking like the trappings of a haughty satraps in possession of the conquered province of some barbaric empire. Indeed, it was incredible what a variety of operations the two gentle creatures had accomplished in that short

time. They had, however, in some measure atoned for other things, by getting their bandboxes and trunks into their own more absolute domain, and leaving sufficient room in the hut to move about in. In the course of the evening, Lieutenant Bracton reached home with a guide; but it was so late as only to give him an opportunity, on his first visit to his station, of feeling the pleasantness of the change from a seat in the saddle on a damp evening in the bush to one by a cheerful three-log fire in a rain-proof hut.

On inspecting his purchase next day, he fully assented to his son's views of its suitableness and value. Katharine and Marianna, also, were not long, after the grass was pronounced to be dry, before they made Willoughby their pilot to the semicircle of crags, about a mile higher up the flat, off and out of which the main body of the stream finds its way. Of an evening Marianna could give herself up to all the revel of her heart; hemmed in by the dark mountains, as the moon rose, first shining against the opposite heights and then lighting them up further and further down, till it appeared at last over the hill behind the hut and looked down at the very spot where she stood. Her more timid cousin loved better the sweet and fragrant morning, and a walk to the hill-top, the unuttered and unutterable hymn of the pious and pure.

Nearly six weeks elapsed before the return of the dray with the furniture selected for immediate use. John Thomas fully made good his title to the character he had received; everything was there, and uninjured, except by so much as injury is unavoidable to furniture in bush transport. John Thomas's still more important charge, the housemaid, also expressed herself perfectly satisfied with the accommodations she had experienced on the road. It is customary for the bullock-driver to spread the tarpaulin over the dray, so as to form a complete tent, the area of which is the space underneath between the wheels. This being *de jure* the driver's own nocturnal retreat, he is supposed, when accompanied by a female, to consign it to the entire control of his passenger, together with his bedding; making the best shift his wit and good fortune may enable him to do for himself.

The arrival of the family in this solitary part of the country had not been altogether unhailed by neighbours. Ghiagong township is about ten miles, perhaps twelve, from the Rocky Springs. Within about a mile of the township resided Lieutenant Bracton's nearest neighbour; and the first also from whose farm a visitor to his family set forth. It was Mrs. Smart, the lady of the settler in question, who was so considerate. After the few first days' novelty, and till habit rectified it, the bush was felt to be lonesome; Mrs. Bracton and the young ladies, therefore, were quite delighted as one fine day about noon, they pointed out to each other a lady on horseback, in a light umber-coloured habit, riding slowly up the road from the point of the hill toward the hut. The horse had an awkward trick—unless, indeed, it were occasioned by the rider's method of managing the bridle—of holding his

mouth aloft and wide open, as if perpetually endeavouring to swallow the bit. Behind the lady, at some distance, rode a servant, in a blue jacket but no waistcoat, a pair of Parramatta trousers, without stockings or gaiters, unpolished lace-ups, and a hat. No gentleman being at hand to assist the lady in alighting, and the man in waiting having stopped to have a yarn at the men's hut door, she almost tumbled over the back of the chair that had been brought out to assist her descent, and was near breaking Marianna's back in recovering herself. The visitor hastened to announce herself to Mrs. Bracton, as "Mrs. Smart, Mem, of Smartville, Mem—near Ghiagong, Mem." Although Mrs. Bracton could not comprehend precisely what particular of the definition was conveyed by the syllable "*mem*," she cordially invited her kind and considerate neighbour into her poor habitation. Marianna, whose experience of the manners of their visitor had been so suddenly acquired, stood with compressed lips till "Mrs. Smart, of Smartville, near Ghiagong," was well into the hut; and then the poor girl, unable any longer to contain herself, almost shrieked into Katharine's ear, "Oh! sister; she has almost broken my back."

Katharine, whose heart had all the tenderness of a child's, put her arm round her cousin and led her on one side of the hut, saying all she could devise in palliation of Mrs. Smart's awkwardness; and when Marianna had overcome the strain, they began to think of going in to make better acquaintance with their neighbour: but Mrs. Smart's volubility became so distinguishable that they both paused as if by a common instinct.

"I am so glad you have come to this part of the country, Mem, I'm so in want of a female friend; oh! you can't think, Mem," (Here there was a pause; which not eliciting the expected rejoinder, the visitor resumed with great pathos.) "Husbands, Mem, have got their faults, that nobody knows of but their wives. I am sure you must have felt it yourself, Mrs. Bracton, Mem."

Marianna turned with uplifted hands to her cousin, and exclaimed, "Isn't that awful? What will mamma do! We had better go in to her." But before she came to the rescue of her mother, the lady of Smartville was heard again.

"The two young ladies your daughters, Mem?"

"One of them is my daughter, the other my niece," said Mrs. Bracton.

"The short young lady your niece, I suppose?"

"No, Mrs. Smart," replied Mrs. Bracton, with a very carefully modulated tone. "The tallest of them is my niece."

"Oh! I see, Mem: a poor relation. We ought to take care of our poor relations. Makes me ask, I've got poor relations of my own. I send home my little boy's cast shoes and frocks every year reg'lar (that is, when I can find anybody that's going) to my sister. She's getting a family, Mem, without end, poor thing! I sometimes think she'll never be done. Now, I've only got one. But, oh! such a boy, Mem!"

Marianna, having a little regained her equanimity after being libelled as short, now straightened herself as well as Mrs. Smart's token of attachment permitted her, and followed Katharine in, to the great relief of Mrs. Bracton. Katharine seated herself by their visitor, with the view of engaging her from further annoying her aunt; Marianna sat down opposite, beside her mother. The pain of the wrench struck her again as she sat down, and her countenance became alternately flushed and pale.

"Dear me, Mem!" exclaimed their visitor, "that young lady looks very bad."

"My dear!" said Mrs. Bracton, in alarm, "what is the matter with you?"

"Only a little faint with the heat of the day, mamma."

"Oh! fainting fits, Mrs. Bracton. No consequence, you know. I was the same myself. A little sal-volatile's a good thing."

"Mrs Smart," said Katharine, who saw that something must be done to bring the present state of affairs to as early a conclusion as possible, and had risen and set the tray with some refreshments; "you have a long way to ride back, and the days are getting very short, now; pray make a hearty lunch before you set off."

Mrs. Smart hastened with alacrity to take Katharine at her word. "I suppose, you haven't got a gherkin, Miss," she, however, inquired, almost immediately.

"No, we have not," said Katharine. "We have yet only just what we could get into our boxes, coming by the mail."

"Oh!" proceeded Mrs. Smart, "you can get anything you want at the township. They have everything at the stores, from a needle to an anchor. He's an old Jew, Miss, that keeps it. Such an ugly old man! I wonder the prisoners some of these nights don't break in and murder him, and take all he's got. But there, it's no use talking: the devil's children will have the devil's luck. They're a dreadful set, Mem, these convicts: you must flog, flog, flog, or else they'll do nothing. There's nothing too hot nor too heavy for them: anything that's an inch high, or an hour old, only leave it in their way, and I'll go bail you never clap eyes on it again."

Mrs. Smart was still proceeding with her descant, when Lieutenant Bracton was descried approaching.

"Here's papa!" exclaimed Marianna.

"Yes, Mem; it's what made me come and see you, that I heard as your good gentleman was a leeftennant. Mr. Smart, Mem, will have great pleasure to do him the honour of making his acquaintance: but, deary me, I ought to say Leeftennant Smart, now your good gentleman's come among us; but I've got so in the way of saying Mister, Mister, since we've been out of the army, and up here among these settlers, that it always goes out of my head."

At this instant Lieutenant Bracton entered. The old gentleman was, both by nature and principle, too kindhearted willingly to wound the feelings of any one, much less of a neighbour and a woman, for the neighbourly and womanly action of trying to enliven the early solitude of his household; but it required all

his self-command and tenacity of purpose to retain his post inoffensively.

Before Mrs. Smart rose to leave, however, something had strangely altered the style of her conversation. She never came again. And Mr. Smart himself, a very plain, worthy man, when Mr. Bracton met him in the township some time afterwards, made no hesitation in acknowledging that he had received his commission for a long course of good conduct in the ranks, and had at length made the best of his means by establishing himself as a settler.

In the course of five or six days afterwards, another neighbour appeared at the hut door of "the Rocky Springs." A great clatter of horses' hoofs was heard coming rapidly down the hill through the bush, while the ladies were at dinner by themselves. Their brother and father being out on horseback, it was supposed to be them; and Marianna, ever eager to greet her father's approach, rose and ran to the door, and was flying out with her usual joyous welcome, when, to her infinite surprise, there sat still on his horse, in the act of leaning forward to knock on the door with the handle of his whip, a young gentlemanly person of about two-and-twenty, with piercing black eyes, which instantly met hers.

"You supposed it was your father, Miss Bracton," said the horseman, with a smile, which he evidently tried to suppress. "Don't let me disturb you; you are probably at dinner?" Katharine now came forward to her cousin's side, as Marianna drew back. "The business of my ill-timed inroad, ladies," said the horseman, who they now saw had heavy pistols at his holsters, and a couple of mounted troopers in his rear, "is to say, that if you will give my constables and horse-police a night's quarters in one of your huts when they come this way, they shall always do so when they can by any means take this place in their road to wherever they may be despatched. My name is Hurley; I hold the office of police magistrate at the neighbouring township of Ghiagong."

"I am sure it is very kind of you, indeed, Mr. Hurley," said Katharine. "You will alight? We cannot set anything better than a mutton chop before you; that is the extent of our larder."

Mr. Hurley's eyes wandered for an instant again to the face of Marianna, who unconsciously withdrew a couple of paces. The temptation seemed too great to resist: "Well," he said, "with such a frank invitation, I suppose I ought to secure your acquaintance whilst I have the opportunity." And, dismounting, he followed his fair conductress in.

Mr. Hurley remained about an hour; the troopers taking the opportunity of unpacking their bush viands, and refreshing themselves at the men's hut. He informed the ladies that there was no existing danger from either bushrangers or the natives,—all was quiet; but he had considered that for it to be known that the station, lonely as it was, was continually visited by the police

would be a great protection in case any marauding parties should hereafter be out. To their great delight, also, they found him fully competent to chat with them about the gay and amusing scenes of London, where he had studied in one of the Inns of Court. Mr. Hurley at length paid his devoirs and rode away, after taking an opportunity, whilst Katharine had gone into the sanctum for a sketch which the cousins had made of the view from the hill, to express his self-gratulations to Marianna at having made her acquaintance.

Mr. Bracton did not reach home till evening, when Willoughby returned with him, having been nearly all day at the township on business.

"Brother," said Marianna, shortly after the party had taken their places at the evening meal, "your visits to the township are growing very suspicious."

"How is that?" asked Willoughby.

"They become so frequent and so protracted."

"Well! what do you argue from that?"

"Only, perhaps, a little further development of your thrifty habits! Well, if you can make your fortune all at once, brother, we'll put up with a little peculiarity in the mode: only you must make sure that it really is something worth while."

"I really don't know what you mean?" said Willoughby.

"The day you brought us from the township, you looked very hard at the pretty young Jewess at the store door, and turned, if you recollect, after we had passed, to look again."

"My sister, papa," said Katharine, "should add her own confessions to those she is making in behalf of Willoughby. There has been a gentleman here to-day, called Mr. Hurley,—is it not, Marianna? And, if her usual way of quizzing and annoying most those she likes best is any criterion, he is high in her favour already."

It was now Marianna's turn to exhibit a degree of discomposure she had unsuccessfully endeavoured to elicit from her brother.

"But," continued Katharine, "the most amusing part of it was, he seemed perfectly to understand it all on the instant. He assumed to be quite at his ease,—talked with everybody but her,—and the more she quizzed him the more he seemed to enjoy himself; I must say that for keeping his countenance he did credit to his profession: it was really rich. But when he was going, and sister stood sulking yonder, he almost walked over mamma and me to her, and said, 'Miss Bracton, how am I so unhappy as not to have an invitation from you, as well as from Mrs. Bracton and Miss Katharine?'"

"I met Mr. Hurley to-day," said Lieutenant Bracton, "and he told me of his call; he seems a very well-educated and gentlemanly young man. I invited him to ride over whenever he found himself at liberty to do so, and he accepted the invitation with some marks of pleasure; which, as you were his principal and

most courteous entertainer, must, of course, Miss Katharine, be on your account."

"Oh, no, sir," said Katharine, "you know that, notwithstanding my twelvemonth's seniority, I am doomed to cousin Willoughby: at least so they used to say at home."

"Well, Kate," said Willoughby, "we'll make a fair bargain; if you can suit yourself better, do so, and I'll do the same; but it's to be understood that we are not to forget one another."

Next day brought another visitor to the Rocky Springs; one, however, to whom the place was well enough known already, though not the new inhabitants. This was Morgan Brown, a stockman, having charge of a herd of cattle belonging to a gentleman in Sydney, at a station called Coolarama Creek, about twelve miles further into the interior. It should be here mentioned that the method of depasturage in New South Wales is by selecting some tract of ground which affords good grass and water, and building upon it (if for horned cattle) a hut and stockyard: one man is placed as hutkeeper, whose duty it is to be constantly at home, and another, called the stockman, whose duty consists in riding constantly about the run, "heading-off" strange cattle, and tracing and driving in again any of his own that stray away. The method pursued with sheep is only just so far varied as the difference of the animal requires. These stockmen are, almost without exception, unprincipled characters; for if not such when invested with the office, its unavoidable licence and temptations soon effect a change for the worse; they continually meet with cattle in the bush without owners; some never branded, others which have strayed so far that no one about the part knows whose brand it is they bear. These, of course, there is every temptation to appropriate and sell; and from selling such chance prizes as these, it is but a step to leaving some of their own master's cattle unbranded, and selling them in due time; or even fixing a brand of their own upon them, and reserving them till they have gathered a little herd. But as these stockmen are continually traversing each other's runs, and becoming acquainted with all the other herds in the vicinity, it is almost inevitable that they should detect each other's malversations; consequently, to secure themselves from mutual betrayal, they act upon a system of complicity,—it is understood among stockmen that nothing need be concealed from each other. The novices, however, are always tried carefully before they are trusted; but, generally, it may be said that wherever cattle-stealing is going on, the whole of the stockmen are hand-and-glove in it. Such was the case at the stations along the Morrumbidgee River, in the vicinity of which Lieutenant Bracton had settled.

Morgan Brown's business now was to find out what sort of a hand the black overseer was likely to turn out. It was known among the stockmen that the late proprietor had some cattle remaining in the mountains, which he had never been able to get

in; and the question was, whether Martin Beck knew of them, and if he did, whether a bargain could be knocked up about them with him.

It was about sundown when Morgan Brown rode up to the hut which Willoughby Bracton contented himself for the present to share with his overseer. Willoughby was up at the large hut at tea, and one of the men was preparing tea for Martin Beck, who was out.

"Have you got any room here?" asked Brown, as he threw himself out of his short stirrups.

Stockmen always ride with short stirrups, partly to save their feet in going over logs, partly for the power it gives of swaying the body to and fro to escape the limbs of trees, and also for ease; as they are often in the saddle twelve hours a day for many days together,

Morgan Brown, however, was not asking a question; he was merely signifying, in the customary way, that he meant to stop there that night: and accordingly, without waiting for any reply, he buckled on his horse's hobbles, took off the saddle and bridle, carried them into the hut, and turned the animal off to graze on the flat below.

"Come," he said, as he threw himself on one of the berths, "how long do you mean to be getting that tea ready, young fellow? Here, just give us a coal on this pipe.—You're the lad! —Budgery you in your own gunyah. Where's your overseer?—This is his hut, isn't it?"

"Yes," said the man. "He'll be here directly."

"What sort of a lad is this cove of yours? Is he a sea-lieutenant or a soldier?"

"Sailor," was the reply.

The stock-keepers affect a rough-bullying way, which generally obtains for them a sort of unwilling civility from the working hands.

"I say, what sort of a customer is this black? Does he know anything about stock?"

"He's a very good hand among stock."

"How many cattle have these people got?"

"Not many yet; but they've bought a large herd, and they're coming on to the run in a few days: the overseer's repairing the stockyard now for branding."

"Oh, then he's a fencer as well?"

"He's a rattling good hand in anything at all about a farm. He ropes a beast as well as ever I saw a man."

"Not afraid at all?"

"Not him."

"Humph!" grunted the inquirer, throwing himself back again on the berth. "If that's the case," he proceeded, silently ruminating, "we must have him for a pal; or else we shall have him for an enemy."

Martin Beck now came in; and the man, who had got ready

another pot of tea for the new comer, put the meat and damper on the table, and went away to his own supper. Martin Beck, immediately he caught sight of the fresh saddle, and its owner in self-satisfied possession of one of the berths, stretched at full length smoking his short pipe, knew that his guest was a stockman, stationed so near as to feel it his right to make himself at home anywhere about the part.

"This is a new hut since I was on this ground last," began the visitor.

"Ay; it's only up a few days. Are you stock-keeping anywhere about here?"

"Coolarama Creek;" said Brown. "Your cove got many coming?"

"About three hundred head, I hear," replied Beck.

"Who is to be stockman?"

"I shall look after them myself, for the present," said Beck. "I believe they mean to have a station between here and your place, at that big water-hole in the white-gum flat. When they do that, there must be somebody sent after them."

"A station at the white-gum flat!" shouted Morgan Brown. "There it is again: there'll be stations every half mile, I suppose, directly. Why, there's not enough for the cattle that are on the ground!"—the whole bush was covered with feed. "Well, when my time's up, I'll be off out of this part; there's getting too many stations for me. When I came up here first, my cattle had a run twenty miles every way; then it was ten; and now, here's going to be three hundred head stuck down within six miles of our hut. A man might as well go stock-keeping in the middle of George Street."

All this perfectly coincided with Martin Beck's own notions and sentiments: though so inappropriate to his present position, that he was cautious of expressing his concurrence.

Morgan Brown, meantime, had worked himself up into a feeling of despair about his future prospects in the cattle-stealing line, which made him almost careless about securing Martin's complicity. Martin consequently became the inquisitor in turn: for, as will be be hereafter seen, he was deeply implicated in this dishonest practice, and even had been addicted to it for years. Intending to remain in this retired part of the country for some time, he felt as desirous of coming to an understanding with Morgan, as Morgan till now with him.

"Are there any 'Rooshans' in the mountains?" he inquired, in that quiet, deliberate way which we have already observed him using, when he overcame his stammer for a particular purpose. His purpose on this occasion was, by an easy, even tone, to throw the stockman off his guard; but he was not aware what questions had been put and solved about himself before he came in.

The light dawned instantly on Morgan Brown, who replied, "I believe you, my lad; and some rum 'uns. I know of four or five young cattle now, that never felt the heat of a brand yet."

"And no down?" rapidly inquired Beck, his voice falling again into its natural tone and stammer, as Morgan's unexpected confidence threw him in turn off his guard.

"Not a bit of a down," responded the stockman, emphatically.

"That's the go!" said Beck: "they're doing nobody any good where they are."

The understanding was perfect. It would but weary and unnecessarily offend the reader to listen any further to the conversation of two such men. They sat down to their meal, meantime, as if an acquaintance of half a century already subsisted between them. And Martin, mindful that he might need the same hospitalities himself hereafter at Morgan's hut, as his berth and bed were not wide enough for two, supplied his accomplice with all but his last blanket; which, with the stockman's own opossum cloak, made a comfortable shakedown, on a sheet of dry bark before the fire; the saddle being, as usual, the pillow.

The arrival of the herd of cattle purchased by Lieutenant Bracton, and of the dray with its load from Sydney, were the only incidents that occurred for some weeks. Mr. Hurley, however, instead of sending the police round by the Rocky Springs, adopted Lieutenant Bracton's suggestion, and came himself. Not rare were his visits, nor hasty his departures; but we do not find that his company was ever considered unwelcome or ill-timed; although more than once, before the addition to the household of their female servant, he surprised his two fair acquaintances whilst deeply involved in the several duties of *Suds Prima* and *Secunda*.

CHAPTER VI.

The township of Ghiagong.—The Jew storekeeper.—The young Jewess.—Rachael at home.

THE ladies had hoped that on the arrival of the dray from Sydney they should find all their wants and wishes supplied; but it turned out, as it always does, that a number of important and (they thought) indispensable minutiæ had been neglected in the selection.

It became necessary, therefore, to have recourse to the Store at the township, and Marianna was fixed upon as plenipotentiary for the domestic part of the purchases, Willoughby accompanying her to select some needful farm implements, &c. Once more the gay-hearted girl sprang lightly into the little green cart, not a little enjoying the prospect of effecting a satisfactory detection of the partiality she had persuaded herself her brother entertained for the pretty Hebrew, and indicating as much by silent tokens to her cousin.

It was a delightful morning; the serenity that a retired life

amidst the stillness of solemn forests and lofty hills, and tracts of level plain and lucid waters, brings home into the hearts of almost all, had not failed to influence Marianna's nature: one of the most sensitive to outward impressions. As they rode cheerily along the sunny greensward, and beneath the shadows of the trees, her lips forgot their customary prattle, and, like two rosy infants wiled from their merry struggles, pillowed themselves against each other in repose.

The township of Ghiagong (for it becomes more proper now than hitherto to retain the native names) occupies a spot on the left bank of the Morrumbidgee, at about ten or twelve miles distant from the Rocky Springs—the horseman estimates it at ten, the pedestrian at twelve, and as yet no authoritative decision of the controversy has been made by the verdict of a surveyor. Suddenly the tract of light, open gum-trees—the advanced guard of the forest veterans—is passed, and a plain covered with fine grass, and swept on three sides by the river, opens to the traveller. The little clear area is a natural plain; only an odd tree here and there, and far apart, has ever appeared upon it; and those have long ago fallen beneath the axe of the hutkeeper, for firewood. The Morrumbidgee is here in the early part of its career, and has not yet received the waters of the hundred giant valleys which eventually drain down to the immense flat country through which it makes its way to the Murray; up to this point the stream is chiefly the product of a comparatively small tract of mountain country, and of the flats in immediate propinquity below. Hence its reaches and bends, not struck out boldly by the force of a voluminous stream, are on a scale of much inferior magnitude to that which marks them further down. At Ghiagong, the river meets the corner of elevated ground that has been fixed on for a township, and, diverted from a straight course, wanders round its base, leaving high and precipitous banks on that side, till it finds ground low enough for its onward progress on the other.

This open and slightly elevated tract of land is of too irregular a shape to be accurately described by terms; but it measures about three-quarters of a mile in length, by half a mile in breadth, its narrowest part being from the river to the bush behind, its greatest length running from end to end of the curve. The settlement had been made at that extremity of the little plain where the river, first checked, begins to wind round it.

Few things momentarily perplex the association of ideas in the mind of a newly-arrived inhabitant of old countries, more than the first sight of an Australian township in its very earliest days: where he expects to find streets and a throng of men, he often meets with no more than half-a-dozen buildings of the most various description, scattered without order and far apart; whilst, at times, he may watch the spot for an hour without seeing half-a-dozen persons. When the visitors from the Rocky Springs approached Ghiagong on the morning in question, such was the case. As they emerged from the bush, on the left of them lay

extended the yet unoccupied plain; on the right, the few buildings dignified by the title of the township. Nearest, and with its back line toward them, there was the Store, a common erection of slabs, with no more than a ground story, bark-roofed, and between forty and fifty feet long by twenty deep. Opposite, nearly a quarter of a mile distant, and facing them, stood the Court House, with a dwelling attached for the resident magistrate, and a lock-up in the rear, its solid stone material and rigid architecture readily suggesting the uses to which it was devoted. To the right of the store, at about the same distance, and thus forming a triangle with the Court House, was the little public-house, lately established, whilst over the intermediate space were scattered five or six huts, from the little plastered and whitewashed cottage of two rooms, down to the bark tent just large enough to cover a bed for a pair of fencers.

The proprietor of the store, Lazarus Moses, commonly called Lazarus, was very aged, but by no means deserved the description accorded him by the refined taste of Mrs. Smart; on the contrary, he was a remarkably fine specimen of the green old age of an Israelite. His eyes, after nearly eighty years' active use, were still clear and brilliant, and his intellect performed all its functions with unimpaired accuracy. Only at times, of late, his daughter, who could compare the present with the past, thought or feared, that she sometimes detected a failure of outward objects to reach the inner faculties with their accustomed force, and an indecisiveness of judgment and a hesitation of will that had not always characterized her father; but so slightly that she readily trusted, and cheerfully hoped, that the notion had no other ground than in the apprehensiveness of her own affection.

As they drove round the end of the store, the first thing they saw was one of those strong well-boned bays so prevalent among stock horses, standing in the warm sunlight, saddled, and having his bridle hung on the hook at the door-post. Over the saddle were slung a pair of two-gallon stone bottles, and which, when the horseman was mounted, would fall somewhere about under the bend of his leg. Alighting and passing into the store, they found Mr. Moses busy with a purchaser. It was Morgan Brown, the stockman stationed at Coolarama Creek.

The Jew received his new customers with all that eagerness and those propitiating courtesies which characterize the business transactions of his race; abandoning for a time the stockman, who was inspecting some articles of apparel, to secure the orders of Mr. Bracton and his sister.

"Rashael!—Ho! Rashael! Rashael! Von of de yong lady vat is come to Diandullah Mountain. Vot can I find for you, my goot sir? Everyting here vat can be vant at a new farm—boot, baragan-fustian, slops for your men, pocket-knife;—best teas at half-a-crown, goot sugar twopence; rum, gin, prandy, all as good as from de bonded store. Ugh!" (he concluded, as the recollection

of the queen's inexorable rates, admitting of no abatement, passed through his mind,) "I buy *very* dear, and sell *very* cheap!"

Rachael had made her appearance; but in the surpassing loveliness of the young female who now stood before her, Marianna Bracton, though well used to the loveliness of her sex decked in their richest attire, utterly forgot to turn her intended gaze upon her brother and scrutinize his thoughts. It was no longer the pretty young Jewess she had heard of, and glanced at as they drove by, but a being on whose outward presence she saw womanhood so gloriously emblazoned, that her heart yearned to embrace her and call her "sister." The Hebrew girl blushed deeply, and Marianna instinctively turned to give her brother a mute reproof: but his face was unflushed; his brows were firm; his eye was only bright with intellectual admiration: she felt that it was the glow of her own bosom that must have awakened those throbbings in the bosom of the young Jewess, and tinted her cheek so deeply.

"Vell, vell," broke in the sound of the old man's voice, as the stockman rode away from the door, "I gif you as mosh as any von for the shkins, bot I vill not puy any prand. Shkins is very goot property; but the prand—no, no." It is necessary to explain that an unbranded skin may be purchased without its endangering the establishment of guilty cognisance by the purchaser; but in the purchase of a branded skin, he is expected to satisfy himself that the brand is that of the vendor; or that the vendor is authorized by the owner.

"Vell, my goot sir," continued he, turning to Willoughby; "Vot goots to-day? Some first-rate vaistcoats for your men—best silk plush—only four dollars—saltbox pocket. There, I shall put you up von dozen at three dollars. No? Vell! I haf not take as mosh ready monish this veek as pay vat the interesht of my monish come to."

That such a statement by an old trader may not discourage others in their adventures, a little comment is necessary. The currency of the interior very rarely takes the form of *ready money;* it is chiefly in drafts, &c., on houses in Sydney, which the parties holding present on making their purchase at these stores; and thus, instead of paying in ready money at them, customers expect to receive their balance in small change. The dealers then send or carry the paper money they collect, when it amounts to a considerable sum, to Sydney, and *there* turn it into cash.

"Come, my goot sir; look about. I vill take your father's order for von tousand pound," said the old man."

"Nails, Mr. Moses, are the main thing I want; some three inch spikes, some batten nails, and some shingle nails."

The storekeeper proceeded to call his occasional porter, who divided his services between the township-store and the public-house, to get out some bags of the articles required.

Willoughby took the opportunity, as invited, to inspect the stock. He seemed to be in a sort of Noah's-ark in the goods line. At the further end stood ranged a row of casks and puncheons,

containing spirits and wines; along the back were various ample tiers of shelves, here displaying piles of cotton prints and calicos; there were ranged tin-ware and ironmongery of all sorts, from the tin-quart to the three-legged iron-pot; in one place there were stocks of boots and shoes, male and female, in another groceries of all sorts from spices to cheese; muslin and lace and ribbon boxes, and rolls of the best cloth were piled not far from oundles of canvass and the coarsest wool baggings; while hoe and axe heads, saws of all sorts and sizes, and all that "too-numerous-to-mention" order of goods, were stowed away in odd corners. A long shilleen or low building, annexed, under a sloping roof, to the main store, opened into it by small doors in the back; and in it were ranged all the heavier goods, such as bags of nails, sugar in the mat, &c., &c. And on the outside might be heard by day the frequent rattle of the chain of a fierce and large watchdog, as he contended against the flies; and his bay by night.

The young man's survey of the merchandize was several times intermitted to draw near to where his sister and the Jewess were busily engaged in their traffic. But he drew near only to gaze and listen, and urge himself away again with a sort of smile of wonder; he had no thought of such a thing as to fall in love with a Jewess.

Mr. Moses at length returned, bringing with him the man he had been in search of. The selection of the nails along with other things occupied a considerable time; and when everything was ready for stowing away in the cart, a sharp rain was found to have commenced. On turning to look for his sister, Willoughby observed her smiling at him from the opposite side of the Pembroke table that stood in the apartment from which Rachael had come, at her father's summons, on their arrival. It was merely a portion of the main building divided off by a line of slabs; but it was ceiled with bark, leaving a loft above; and the slabs were plastered and whitewashed. It was also handsomely furnished; for none are more given than are the Jews to surround themselves within doors with the little elegancies of life:—always a token, when nationally customary, of refined feeling. Rather more than half of the area thus walled off from the store was furnished as a sitting-room; the other portion being again divided into two small sleeping apartments.

As Marianna caught her brother's eye, she lifted her finger, and with something that looked very much like exultation, pointed it toward the small glass window, against which the rain was beating fast and audibly. He also saw that her bonnet and gloves were off, and that the decanters and a plate of very tempting cake had been placed upon the table. Rachael, also, who appeared to be partly enjoying Marianna's delight, and partly thinking seriously about the inconvenience the rain would be likely to cause her, rose the instant she saw that Willoughby had completed his loading, and inviting him to the chair she left, placed another for herself by Marianna. But before seating herself, Rachael stepped

forward again, and placing the cake and wine before him, said, with a scarcely perceptible failure of good accent and phraseology, as she turned to Marianna—"I will make *you* help yourself, and then you will come again. It seems to me as if I had known you a great many years," she added, smiling, but yet with an expression of voice and feature in which lurked something of sadness.

"It seems to me, Rachael, as if I had known you a great many years," replied Marianna; and, touched by the plaintive tones of the voice, she turned and placed her hand on the Jewess's arm. "Well, I must prove your friendship," she continued, mirthfully, after an instant's pause. "You have invited me to stay with you till to-morrow, if it continues raining: and although I said No, I assure you I meant Yes."

"I am so glad to hear you say so!" exclaimed the Jewess; "I often wish that my father would live where we could see our people. Our life here is like that of a bird in the wilderness. To see them," she added, in the same tone that had before attracted Marianna's attention, "would be something."

Marianna again looked inquiringly into her face; but Rachael appeared unconscious of the effect of her last remark, and entered into no explanation of it.

The rain beat down more vehemently as the day advanced. A tarpaulin had been thrown over the purchases in the cart, as a temporary protection; and some empty bags, according to custom, had been lent to the poor dumb helper of man's labours, for a great-coat. But the bush must have become so swampy, and the difficulty of keeping the right direction, where the tracks were faint, so increased by the impossibility of discerning the mountain through the rain and haze, that Willoughby readily yielded to the old storekeeper's persuasions to remove the goods again into the store, and ride home in the saddle. He saw that he need not commend his sister to the care of her young hostess; and the wealth of Lazarus was notoriously such as to render the obligation one of no moment to him as a matter of cost. The old man, moreover, seemed to kindle into a new vivacity at the mention of the arrangement by his daughter; and none the less when he saw the young Gentile lady leaning on the arm of his beloved child, as they came into the store together to look out at the weather. Instead of feeling any hesitation about leaving Marianna, in the Jew's dwelling, Willoughby felt—what all feel who observe the Jews in their own families—how strangely vulgar estimation libels the Hebrew race.

"Poor fellow; what a wretched journey he will have!" exclaimed Marianna, as Willoughby at last dashed off across the half-deluged plain: "and it is almost dark, too."

"I have heard say," said Rachael, "that men have a joy in strife of every kind; that it is their nature to struggle with the elements, to subjugate wild lands, to hunt the fierce beasts of the desert, and—but oh, what a delusion and a vanity that must be!

—to destroy one another, for the mere gratification of their passions."

No more customers came to the store that night. The doors were soon closed and barred, and the evening meal was placed upon the board: the kettle of the little Hebrew family sang much as Christian people's kettles are wont to sing. Marianna saw, with mingled emotions of awe, and love, and joy, that after the meal was partaken of, both the silver-haired ancient and the black-tressed maiden were silent for a time, with heads bowed down, as those who give thanks for the bounties of the Creator.

The operations connected with the removal of the equipage of the tea-table, and its restitution to a state of fitness for fresh service, presented an opportunity for Miss Bracton to show how adept she had already become in the performance of the duties demanded of her by her new style of life. Still, Rachael had more than once to suppress a smile or blush at some amusing inadequacy, or droll mistake, of her visitor. Before their task was completed, the old man arose, and Rachael hastened to receive her father's evening blessing and caress; and when Marianna advanced and extended her hand and bade him good-night, the venerable Israelite stretched forth the other and laid it upon her head, and blessed her in the name of the God of his fathers. The world was shut out; thoughts of thankfulness had multiplied in his heart as he listened to the pelting of the vehement rain without, and watched the comfortable security of his child within. He had listened to the joyous utterances of the two young hearts to each other, and his soul melted towards the stranger, who had made Rachael happy beyond her wont.

When the young girls sat down and chatted by themselves, all housekeeping duties at an end, it was sometimes of joyful things, and sometimes, again, of sorrowful. At length their words were of themselves, and of their own thoughts, and hopes, and aversions, and loves; each speaking of the faith of her own heart, more that the other might say that she had the same faith, than in the spirit of evil days, when emulation has led the heart away from its innocence, and sullied the truth and destroyed the kindliness of the spirit.

"Hush!" said Rachael, suddenly; and they both listened for some moments: "I thought I heard a strange noise from my father's room. It must have been the moan of the dog in the rain," she continued, when at length it was not repeated. "I am so afraid sometimes that my father will die; then I shall be quite alone on the earth."

"Not alone, darling Rachael," said Marianna, tenderly, as she drew the head of the young girl down on to her bosom. "How kind you have been to me: can I ever forget you?"

"We know not," said the Jewess: "our hearts are a shifting sand. When my mother was first taken away, I thought I should never forget her, and my father was as one from whose eyes the light is withdrawn; but now I sometimes think we should hardly go out to bid her come in, if she were standing at the door."

"Oh, think not so; think not so," said Marianna; that is but the wandering of the thoughts: the heart is still the same; for to love is to lose oneself in the consciousness of that lovelier presence that smiles upon us. We may forget the smiles till we can reach the presence again; but then, believe me, darling, all the love will come back again, fond and full as ever. Are there none among your own people, among the living of your nation, whom you love, excepting your father only?"

"None," said Rachael, "whom I love; though my heart still longs to gaze upon them. Perhaps I ought to be ashamed of the weakness, for I am to them as the flesh of that beast; and what is worse still, they persecute my father for my sake. My mother, Miss Bracton," she continued, "read your Scriptures, and she bade me read them; and I have read them, and will ever read them. Oh, what a man was your prophet! And yet, is it not a marvel that the Jews should be wrong?—the martyrs of the law and the testimony—the heroes of this world-long struggle against the supremacy of the evil—the keepers of the spark given forth from the impregnable glory!"

"That we are right," said Marianna, "we know by history and by our institutions. Inquire no more, dear Rachael: read on. But let us talk of something else, for you have become too sad."

The little Dutch clock in the store at length rang off eleven; a long excess over the hour for repose in the bush. The two young girls hastened to their couch, and slumbered in their beauty—types, this of the bright and spirit-moving times of the past and present and future of Christendom—that, of the sad and gorgeous era of the ancient world.

CHAPTER VII.

Coolarama Creek Station—The Stock-yard—A "Shiveau" at the Hut—"Whacking the blunt"—Beck's history.

At a much earlier hour than he would have chosen himself, Willoughby Bracton proceeded to the township for Marianna; urged by his father's opinion that it would have been better to have housed with his sister for the night at the little inn, and sent home a messenger, instead of leaving her among persons of unknown character. As he was returning with Marianna, just as they drew near that point of the mountain at which the road turned round it up the bank of the creek to the ground overlooked by the huts, and reached the edge of the forest, they saw Martin Beck pursuing his way at a sharp canter down the flat on the opposite side of the creek. The little stream, as already observed, pursued its way from thence to the river; and the overseer's course was one that, if followed out, would lead him to the Morrumbidgee, a few miles below that confluence.

"I wonder what he can be riding so hard for in that direction?" said Willoughby, rather speaking to himself than addressing his sister. "The cattle were all up the creek a couple of miles this morning, when I fetched in this horse; I suppose there must be some odd ones strayed off."

"He is a most singular man," replied Marianna; "he's away half the day sometimes, and nobody can find him; and then, at night, he'll make a fire of the chips, or the old rails and posts he's taking down at the stockyard, and keep on working till eleven or twelve o'clock. Does he have a 'feed,' as they call it, when he comes in?"

"Oh, of course!" replied Willoughby.

"And do you join him?" inquired Miss Bracton, laughing.

"Well, sometimes. It's impossible, you know, to be waked out of a good sleep at that hour, and hear the frying-pan crackling and hissing, and see the hut as light as at noonday with the blaze, and lie still."

"I should tell him not to wake me in that way, if I were you."

"Oh, I have; but it's of no use. He takes as much notice of me as he would of you: laughs, and says he's overseer."

"In that hateful way of his: that laugh, brother, does not come from his heart. There's a depth of deceit about that man."

"Ah! you're such a judge of character," responded her brother. "You said the same about my old friend, Charley Duncan."

"Well?"

"Well, and you see, though you thought so ill of him, your inseparable Miss Poynton snapped him up: and I'm sure she's shrewd enough."

"I've heard all about it, brother, before we sailed," said Marianna, significantly. "If *your* friend had nothing to tell you, *our* friend told us something."

"What was it? Did Charley smoke too many cigars: or did he want to go a long whaling voyage again, and she wouldn't let him?"

The arrival of the travellers at the door of the little homestead was suffered to prevent the revelation of Mr. Duncan's precise offence.

The overseer, meantime, kept a steady canter down the flat for about five miles; there the flat terminated in a point, formed by the gradual approximation of the mountain range and the river. Well-worn cattle tracks or paths here ran along the river side, higher and lower down the round end of the range. There might be five or six of them, like narrow terraces one above another; and the length of the shelving ground was about a quarter of a mile. At its termination they turned round, and followed the other side of the mountain up a gully, narrow at the entrance, but in some parts more extended as it proceeded. Down this gully—sometimes keeping the midway and leaving equal flats on each side; but sometimes diverging to the sides, and thus present-

ing all the low ground on one side and the abrupt rise of the hills on the other—ran the water-course already mentioned as Coolarama Creek. The station where Morgan Brown was stockkeeping was reached after running the creek up about seven miles, and was the first and only station on it. The water-course itself commenced some four or five miles still higher; but no other station was to be met with. The timber generally was of a much heavier character than that met with in the open forest, and gave to the gully, where it happened to be narrow and the hills steep and high, a gloom and a chillness which rendered the travelling far from cheerful. Beck had often to walk his horse, for the tracks sometimes ran up over steep stony points that jutted out into the low ground, whilst in others they followed the flat, passing over fallen trees or crossing the creek itself, where the cattle found such to be their most direct course to and fro. Heavy floods sometimes swept down the bed of the creek, and even extended over the flats; but in general it presented merely a chain of water-holes or ponds, with tracts of the dry bed betwixt. These, however, were in several places deep and large. Such was the condition of the creek at the present time. About half a mile before reaching the station, the creek turned at a very sharp angle, almost retracing its way in the direction it had come; and as the range here was neither very high nor very steep, nearly a mile was saved by riding over its elbow to the hut, instead of following round the course of the water.

It was thus nearly noon before Beck reached the top of the ridge where it looked down on the hut; a bark erection of only a single apartment, such as two or three persons could move about in without being in each other's way. It had apparently been built some years, and not very carefully, for the bark, both of the sides and roof, was ragged-looking, weather marked, and warped; a more than ordinary volume of smoke issued from it, sailing away almost in a straight line on the wind, through the cold, dull atmosphere of the day.

At the further end, or rather lying off from the corner, and extending frontward, was the stock-yard. It may be needful here to state that these stock-yards are enclosures varying in extent and height according to the numbers and strength of the cattle; sometimes there is merely the single yard; but where all the operations connected with very large herds are to be provided for, a very considerable area is enclosed, which is again sub-divided into compartments, communicating with each other. Very wild herds, or such as contain very powerful animals, require great height and strength of fence; but in general a fence of five good rails, each about eight or ten inches wide, by two or three thick, with posts about every nine feet apart, and let into the ground from two and a half feet to three, affords sufficient resistance to the rush of a herd. The height of such a fence is about five feet six inches, and is sufficient to prevent the common cattle from leaping out.

"Russians," however, as they are called, will often go over at a bound; and with lowered head and erected tail, and darting at everything in the shape of man or beast that they encounter, make good their retreat into the mountains. Where such cattle are to be dealt with, a six-rail fence, with a round top rail over all, is sometimes necessary, and all the timber of strength proportionably greater. The ingress and egress of the herd is betwixt two massive posts, a foot or eighteen inches in diameter, placed at about ten or twelve feet asunder, and furnished with strong round or flat rails, that can be slipped in and out as required. The force of a heavy herd rushing out is, notwithstanding, such as often to carry away the posts.

The stock-yard at Coolarama Creek was one of the smaller class —merely a single enclosure—with a much less one attached, as a pen for calves. Its timber was so grey and old as to bespeak an antiquity of some years; and in sundry places decayed rails had been replaced by round saplings, rough out of the adjacent bush. The slip-rails were up, and a solitary heifer of about three years old was walking impatiently about the yard, followed hither and thither by her calf, with wild bounds, and every symptom of terror and excitement. It is only the possession of a second calf which elevates the beast into the rank of *cow*, in the strict phraseology of the stock-yard.

Morgan Brown, it appeared, did not bring his herd home very often, for the marsh-mallows were growing in bunches as large as the common bramble-bush on the outside of the fence in several places; and the interior of the yard, though bare, was but little trodden; whereas, in yards much used there is usually a flooring of dust some inches in depth. Altogether, the whole station, hut, yard, and vicinity, had a solitary and desolate aspect.

But very different in character were the sounds that greeted Beck's ear as his horse stepped obliquely down the side of the range, carefully as good stock-horses who traverse much mountain learn to do, yet, nevertheless, every few paces slipping sideways down on the loose stones without losing his feet. A voice, of that mixed accent which distinguishes the offspring of Dublin parents of the lowest class, born in one of our great English cities, was singing, with the richest licence of droll intonation, a composition, of which we retain only the concluding verses, but which might be not inaptly entitled "The Family Man"— a phrase signifying, in the "flash" dialect, "a thief," or "cross-man." The fragment will at once illustrate their sentiments, and identify the melodist himself with that portion of the population whose right of passage to the colony is presented to them with so many grave public ceremonies at the various Old and New Bailies.

THE FAMILY MAN.

There's never a chap—Bob, Arthur, or Dan—
Lives half such a life as "a countryman;" *
He scours the city, he sweeps the road;
Asses laden too heavy he helps to unload;
He spends all he gets, and he gets all he can,
Does the rattlin', roarin' Family Man.

There's never a chap—Bob, Arthur, or Dan—
Half such a chap as a countryman;
If you've little or none you may share in his mess,
If you've got too much he'll help you to less;
He gets all he spends, and that's all he can,
Does the rattlin', roarin' Family Man.

To these lyric stanzas, a rolling chorus was supplied by six or seven voices repeating the first couplet of each at its conclusion: a short interlude being supplied in the same manner after the chorus by deafening shouts.

"Good song, Dubbo!"—"Here, whet thee whistle, lad!"—"I'll back Mikkey for a strave against all Morrumbidgee!"—"Silence!"—"Attention!"—"The song, gentlemen!"—"Bob, shut up; go on, Dubbo!"

These scenes and sounds, which may be supposed to be novel to the reader, were to Martin Beck habitual and familiar in the daily experience of many years. As he got off his horse at the end of the hut the animal gave a snort, and turned his head up the creek, when, looking round, Martin saw two other horses grazing at a little distance, one naked, the other hobbled and saddled, and having the bridle tied short to one of the stirrups, so as to allow of his feeding without entangling himself. Passing his own bridle round his horse's neck, and fastening it, he turned it off unhobbled (as it never wandered far) to join the others.

The door of the hut had been shut against the sharp and blusterous wind that was blowing, and on Martin opening it, the din of voices ceased instantly. There being no window, and the dusky interior having become impervious to vision from the dense volume of tobacco-smoke, it was not at first apparent of what materials the assemblage was composed. As the smoke cleared with the wind, it could be discerned that a whole group, of different ages, aspects, and garments, was gathered together; but almost every one had the stock-whip either in his hand, or hung round his neck, or near him on the ground. On Beck's entrance, two or three jumped up from the little round blocks, or the berths on which they were sitting, as if surprised.

"Only our pal from the Rocky Springs," said Morgan Brown, very composedly, and with a touch of drollery, as if enjoying the apprehensions of some of his companions.

"Oh! I beg the gentleman's pardon," said the singer; "I didn't see his face—it's so dark."

* We apprehend this term must be of similar signification with the other.

A general laugh attested the hit.

"I thought it was some swell cove," said another.

"Here, young fellow, drink," said a fourth.

"What do you call this?" said Martin, in his regulated tone—"tea?"

"Tea!" said Dubbo; "who drinks tea out of the little end of a pint pot? No, lad; it's a drop of as good rum as your cove's got in his stores, though he is an old sea-dog."

"I'll taste," said Martin, relaxing into something more of good-fellowship than he usually did, in his laugh. "But I never drank two glasses in one day in my life yet."

"He never does drink, lads," interposed Morgan Brown, who saw that the Black's refusal was producing offence and mistrust of him; "but he has always got a good glass to give the likes of us at his own hut."

This explanation and certificate restored the general community of sentiment; and, after Martin had drunk part of the allowance served out to him, the panikin was replenished for the company *seriatim*.

More serious business now came forward. The several head of cattle about which Morgan and Beck had held communication had been got in and disposed of; the various individuals present giving various sorts of assistance. Some had helped to get them into Morgan's yard, or drive them to where the purchaser required them delivered; another had found the purchaser; and so on throughout. The proceeds amounted to upwards of ten pounds, which was now divided. But nothing explicit was said about the source from which the money came; as Rowley the hut-keeper could not be sent away from the carouse without incurring the imputation of treating him unhandsomely, whilst he was not yet among the fully initiated. After the settlement was effected, by the interchange of small orders and by various acts of barter, and with very little ready cash, the conversation proceeded more freely.

"So you're going to give Morgan your share for that heifer and her calf?" inquired one of the party of Beck.

"She's well worth it," said the overseer. "I know her breed."

"You had better put her somewhere out of sight," remarked another.

"Now then, guy!" retorted Brown, pointing to the hut-keeper, but unobserved by him. "I've had her ever since she was five months old. She's my own."

"Ha!" exclaimed the individual, who was trying to "chaff" Morgan; "she's yours till the right owner comes for her. But I don't blame you. I wish I could get the same price for half a dozen."

"Oh!" replied Martin, "she's worth the money; but if it is a little too much, what's the odds? If anybody ought to have a chance, it's a prisoner."

"You say right, lad. You're a native, I hear?"

"Of the Derwent," added Beck.

"Well, that's all one. If ever I can serve you, you know where to come. I like to hear a man speak that way about a prisoner—it shows he knows himself."

The sentiment was reiterated by all who heard it proclaimed: to secure which verdict of universal feeling in his favour, was Martin's object in expressing himself as he had done.

Shortly afterwards, at Beck's proposal, several of the party proceeded out to the yard to help him to brand the heifer and calf. The brand was already at the hut; it was a new one, ordered of the blacksmith at the township by Beck, and brought home by Morgan, when he visited the stores of Lazarus Moses for the rum now in course of consumption. The operation occupied but a few minutes. As we shall have to speak of a branding-day on a larger scale hereafter, in connexion with still more important incidents, the process may here be passed by without further remark. As soon as the branding was completed, the beasts were turned out of the yard, and, maddened with the terror and pain, rushed furiously away over the hills. It was a point well understood by custom, that Morgan would find them again for the new owner whenever he might require them; and their habituation to Morgan's run was ample security for their remaining there. Martin caught his horse and rode homeward; the other stockmen returned to the hut to finish the rum (the liquor of course being at the general expense), and to play off the balances of their accounts at the scarcely ever varied game—all-fours.

Martin Beck rode up over the hill again, and down into the creek, and homeward. "It's all to the good yet," he muttered; "only for those precious women with their black looks. Perhaps it's only my fancy. Come, Doctor, be alive (and in went the spurs): it's hungry time o' day."

At the time that Martin Beck first applied to Lieutenant Bracton, he was just arrived in Sydney from the Coal River, not from the Derwent, as he stated. Nor was he a native of the Derwent, but of the elder colony; his birthplace being not many miles from Sydney, on one of the rivers near to Port Jackson. But he had for some years been absent from the vicinity of Sydney, partly at the Five Islands and partly to the north, in the Coal River districts. The latter portion of the time he had spent near the Coal River, which is the name prevalent in the colony for the lower part of the Hunter. There he had been employed in the cedar grounds taking contracts for plank; and, as he was a first-rate workman in the bush, executing large parts of them himself. But along with his mechanical work in the bush, he had also pursued the system of cattle-stealing, till he had possessed himself of several hundred head.

At length, in the district where he had been carrying on his course of plunder on every herd within convenient distance, what is called in the colony a "cattle racket" took place. These cattle rackets can be explained to the English reader only by stating that their

origin is generally the discovery of some wholesale aggression on horned cattle by one, or a knot of several; and as an immediate consequence, a universal suspicion of all parties who seem to have acquired large herds, or the reputation of possessing large herds, in a short period. Martin Beck, working and living chiefly in the brushes or very thickest forest, covered also with underwood, in pursuit of his occupation, had been aware of the most solitary and rugged places for hiding his stolen cattle; and by so hiding them secured himself from all beyond the mere suspicion of possessing them. But it was customary for parties brought before the magistrates on the charge of cattle-stealing, to endeavour to secure the position of queen's evidence, by giving information against others; even though they possessed no available knowledge of their guilt. Now Beck from his childhood had been betrayed, by his insulated and depressed position as a black, into a perpetual habit of endeavouring to attract regard and attention. He felt the natural strength of his character, and was discontented with his social rank. Hence, several years previously to any danger accruing, he had been in the habit of boasting, among his mates in the bush, of the possession of a good herd, until it was become a standing thing among them to give him credit for having (somewhere or other) a large stock; and the very circumstance that it was "somewhere or other," involved the assurance that they had been obtained unfairly. Therefore, when a cattle racket broke out at the head police-section of the Coal River district, and some of those whom Beck was most intimate with came to be in custody, he decamped, under the apprehension that he might be informed against. The cattle were tolerably safe in the gullies between the Australian Agricultural Company's land and the mass of mountains behind, but chiefly in the brushes and ravines of William's River; and if found and owned, could only be lost to him. Meantime, his business was to take care that he himself was not found and owned. To prevent such a catastrophe, he proceeded to Sydney, determined to seize the first opportunity that offered to get to some distant part of the territory, where he would not be known; and in a few days he succeeded in getting into the position he now held at the Rocky Springs.

It will not detract from either the amusement or the knowledge this account is intended to afford, to state that the character of Martin Beck is not a fictitious one; but one which the writer had long and ample opportunities of studying. Beck was a man whose abilities compelled homage: but the contempt of society had repelled him—insulated him; first made him selfish, and then rendered him cunning. And that cunning, isolation, and selfishness, is at this period a complete definition of his character. He was no drunkard, no petty thief, no libertine; on the contrary, he delighted in labour, in economy, and—but for the vice that was so singularly swallowing up his whole nature—in manliness. But man was his enemy. Then what faith had he to keep? None, except to himself. How was he to keep that? He thought, by getting

power. What was power, as he had had the opportunity of discerning? Wealth.

CHAPTER VIII.

"The Musquito Fleet"—The "Little Bee"—Trip to Broken Bay—Brisbane Water—Reuben Kable's Farm—The "Daisy of the Bay"—Mary Kable at home—A forsaken farm—A tête-a-tête—The old Nurse.

A FEW days after the events of the last chapter, Willoughby Bracton proceeded again to Sydney. The object of his journey was to conclude the arrangement for two flocks of sheep, which had been inspected by Lieutenant Bracton at an out-station of one of the large stock proprietors in the Morrumbidgee district; the owner himself being resident in the capital.

On Willoughby's arrival in town, the owner being absent at one of his farms in another part of the country, it was necessary to await his return. In the mean time, it occurred to the young emigrant that the knowledge and judgment of his friend Reuben Kable might be most judiciously taken advantage of as a final direction; and, being as yet without any personal friends in the capital, the prospect of the trip to Broken Bay was too tempting to be resisted.

On making inquiry as to the best method of proceeding thither, he found that he could travel either by land or water. The journey landwise involved a long and troublesome detour, if made on horseback; and transit by vehicles to the vicinity he had to reach there was none: nor probably will there exist any for many years to come; so rugged, broken, and mountainous is the whole country around the spot, both behind and on either side. On the other hand, numbers of little one and two masted craft and other vessels trade to Sydney and back from the various lesser bays into which the parent bay diverges; carrying colonial produce to the capital, and bringing back the merchants' importations from Britain and from foreign countries generally, to the fireside of the solitary bushman on the margins of these arms of the sea. So numerous, indeed, are these little coasting vessels to Broken Bay and other places lying northward, and to the various settlements rising up to the southward of Sydney, as to have obtained for them, among sea-going people in the harbour, the popular title of the Mosquito Fleet; for, when strong easterly gales have brought all into Port Jackson and prevented any getting out, on the setting-in of a fair wind they all set sail together.

It was one of these small craft, the *Little Bee*, of Brisbane Water, that Willoughby, as he walked along the broad level of the Market Wharf, cut in the living rock, and overlooked from the crag above by all the various and irregular buildings of the back of the town, selected for getting a passage in. She was one of the smallest class of decked schooners, built for running up the salt-

water creeks as far as they can be navigated by a vessel fit to go to sea: she was the pride of the trade as a sea-boat, though, with a full lading aboard, very little of her hull was out of water. Most of these small craft are good sea-boats; and so they had need be. The climate is liable to sudden and violent changes of wind, and the class of men navigating the small coasters are but too apt to give way on shore to intoxication; whilst, again, they never go on board till the last minute, and the whole duration of the few hours' voyage, which is along a rocky and dangerous coast, is not more than sufficient to restore their sobriety. The crews of these small coasting traders may be very correctly described as the moral refuse of the regular marine class, but possessing a plentiful ingredient of first-rate seamanship. Hence it often happens that the owner puts in command a steady man, little more than a mere landsman, depending upon him for the security of the property and the caution necessary in the management generally, and leaving him to take the measures required for the safety of his own life at sea, by picking out a crew that he can depend upon, and using his own discretion only to go to sea when his hands are fit for their duties. Both skipper and hands are generally paid by the trip, not by the month; and thus made to feel it their interest, as well as it is the owner's, to make good as many trips as they can. It was one of this sort of skippers whom Willoughby Bracton hailed from the Market Wharf, as he saw him getting all ready for a start, on board the *Little Bee* as she lay moored a few fathoms off from the wharf.

"Hoy! 'board the *Bee!* Where's your skipper?"

"I b'lieve I'm some'at o' the sort myself," replied the man addressed, a very deliberate sort of person of about thirty; thickset, and with a countenance in which gravity and good humour were about equally portrayed. Probably to any other kind of questioner he would have paid no further attention, but have gone on quietly coiling the ropes; but seeing Willoughby in a blue jacket and trousers and black waistcoat, and recognising a sort of chief-mate tone in his hail, he stood still and looked at him.

"You run to Broken Bay, don't you?"

"Yes."

"When are you off?"

"Now; directly. Tide's beginning to run down strong; and there's a wind coming that'll carry us from one anchorage to the other: that is, if we can save the tide at the mouth of Broken Bay; it's coming round to the south as fast as it can come, and looks as if it meant to blow pretty fresh."

"I want a passage. You go to Brisbane Water for timber, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Do you know a settler of the name of Kable there?"

"Ay; a native. There's a boat of his just dropped down the harbour; but it'll be too late for you to catch her. I can give you a passage. We shall be off his wharf to-night, if all's well."

"Send your 'dingy' then," said Willoughby, using profes-

sional freedom, on seeing the dingy was not yet hoisted in, and no waterman's boat was at hand. The skipper of the *Bee* was too glad of the chance of an extra hand to demur adding that accommodation to his former proffer; so, after turning himself deliberately round, and lifting his Scotch cap and scratching his head, he got into the dingy, and pulled Willoughby aboard.

In another half hour the *Little Bee* was splashing rapidly along the lively surface of the water, which alternately flashed with the oblique rays of the late afternoon sun, and gloomed under the first clouds of a southerly breeze. The young mariner's mind was soon at ease about her points as a sailer; away she skimmed, like a strong young sea-bird, down the harbour, past island, and battery, and point. The golden glow of Australia's evening sun lay rich upon whole provinces of lofty woodland, following round in the distance the windings of the stream. On went the *Little Bee*. And now the broad reach is gained, whence the eye looks suddenly out through the giant portal of those enormous crags, the "Heads," into the main ocean. Brisker blows the breeze, and fairer to it still lays the course of the lively little craft; and forth she bounds into the blue and dancing billows of the open sea. The wind was now as fair as a wind could be, and after securing good sea-room and shifting the ballast to steady her better with a wind right aft, all hands gathered round the fire that was smouldering in a large tin vessel which looked very like a saucepan with holes cut round it, and lit their short pipes; whilst Willoughby took his trick at the helm.

The whole line of the shore, as they now had it on the larboard beam, is one mass of magnificent crag. Here and there appears an inlet or a strip of beach; but the general impression is that of one of the most rockbound of coasts. The sun was setting full over the land, and its last rays shot over the rocks, throwing their precipitous face into deep shadow, and giving to the ocean barrier a frowning aspect in accordance with the forlorn and mighty task assigned to it.

A balloon view of Port Jackson and Broken Bay would exhibit them as two great sea-inlets about twenty miles distant from each other: Port Jackson smaller, possessing fewer arms, but unequalled for security in heavy weather, and (what is more important for the exigencies of a capital) affording egress through an adjacent country entirely clear of steep mountainous tracts; whilst, on the other hand, Broken Bay, penetrating a part of the land singularly broken and mountainous, labours under the disadvantage of the utmost difficulty of access from the land side, but breaks away into a number of arms or minor bays. The latter peculiarity of course arises from the former; the mountain streams meeting the salt-water from all quarters, either by the deep fissures of the land, or else by cutting their channels till they have got far below the salt-water level.

There are no less than seven of these minor openings from the sides of the main bay into the mountain district around. Of

these, three take an inland direction back towards Sydney, the remaining four stretch on toward the north. Betwixt them, or in at the very head of the main bay, flows the Hawkesbury River; one of the most considerable for population and produce, and one of the best for navigation and tracts of good alluvial soil, in the colony. Brisbane Water, on the other hand, is the first, and by far the most considerable, of the arms on the side most distant from Sydney, and consequently pierces the land in the opposite direction. Broken into the most irregular outlines, bordered by tracts of excellent soil, it bids fair in future ages to be at once the most sequestered, romantic, and flourishing of settlements; affording a rural retreat from the toil and glare and dust of the capital during the mid-heat of summer. Already numerous farms enliven its ever-varying shores: here, one occupies a headland; there, two nestle together on opposite sides of some small creek, almost down at water level betwixt higher land; while many are seen lying back at the head of little bights; and others again specking a long tract of low beach, with the hills rising by long and gradual ascent behind.

From the Market Wharf, whence Willoughby started, to the great "Heads," where Port Jackson yields up its waters to the ocean, is a run, with a favourable wind, of seven or eight miles: from the North Head to the southernmost head of Broken Bay, another vast point of rock called Barrenjueh, may be called, in round numbers, twenty; and from Barrenjueh Point to the head of Brisbane Water—a broad flat shore, to the very edge of which come down the magnificent gum forests, and most like the round end of a lake—can scarcely be made, in sailing, under a dozen miles: a total of forty miles; a steamer might diminish the distance a little. The tide delaying all the boats going into Broken Bay, for some time, off Broken Bay Heads, the *Little Bee* made her anchorage but a short time before midnight. Reuben's craft dropped her anchor abreast of his own wharf on the west side, at four or five miles short of its extremity; the *Bee* was somewhat lower down, where she had to take in her next load.

This was the first time that Willoughby had been without companionship of much interest on his own element in this quarter of the world; the first time for some months that he had had a horizon clear of trees, or of some other interruption. And when he looked up at the dark sky, twinkling with ten thousand stars, but only in a small section near the horizon recognised those he had been used to gaze at from his childhood, he became suddenly conscious that he was in a new land—more conscious by far than he had become amidst the endless tracts of the interior. The width of water from shore to shore was several miles; but, hemmed round as it was on all sides by high lands, and reached by a long and winding channel impenetrable to the roll of the ocean, its surface displayed scarcely a ripple. The wind had sunk, the boatmen had stowed themselves away below for the

night, and there was no sound from anything nigh at hand except the quick and plashy rattle which a fast-flooding tide makes against the round bottom of a boat. The bordering land lay like darkness itself, showing in a few places only a solitary light, where some tree smouldered away in red charcoal without blaze, or where a party of clearers roused together their logs at the midnight summons of their mate on watch, filling the air for a few moments with a roar of flame and a burst of sparks. Now and then a watchdog bayed out suddenly from some point where there was a farm, and then a whole chorus rang right round the whole shore of the bay, the barkings and their echoes mingling in strangest mimicry; so that even the animals themselves would suddenly pause, and seem to listen and wonder to hear their deep-mouthed clamours thus answered; and then they would utter again one sharp single bark, and listen—and often so for many times together.

These small crafts have often not a bed or a blanket aboard: it was thus with the *Bee*. The hands were well enough pleased with their passenger to have given him up a bed, if they had had one; but they had not. When Willoughby lifted up the hatch, and jumped down into the dark hold, he crawled first over the bulky body of the skipper, and judging he should better himself but little by going further, folded his monkey-jacket close around him, and stretched himself to rest on the planks, as he had many a time done before in far less clement latitudes.

Willoughby's rest terminated before the heavy sleep of the sailors, whose nights were often broken in upon by their trips; whilst, between getting cargo in and out on the one part, and spending their dollars on the other, they devoted very little time to supplying the deficiency by day when in harbour. As he stood up and turned off the hatch, he saw the sun was risen; and springing up on deck, the western shore of Brisbane Water displayed itself for several miles downward, and again upward to its broad curved extreme, smiling under the cheerful light of the almost level rays; while a light mist circled in places along the face of the water. The prospect was varied with every feature of a shore, from the bluff headland of gray moss-covered stone and the ghibber gunyah,* where the fisherman or the outlaw sleeps behind his fire, far back beneath the overhanging shelf of rock, to the long shoal ground of the mud-flat and the sandy bottom where pelicans wade far out to play and fish. The sunlight and fresh air that now penetrated into the hold, quickly dispelled the slumbers of the crew, and speedily swept away every trace of the thin mist, leaving the surface of the water like molten gold. The skipper was the first to pop his round and unkempt head out of the hatch; when, looking round for an instant without discerning his passenger, and seeing the boat still on deck, he sprang up with unwonted alacrity. An instant's survey, however, sufficed to assure

* Aboriginal term. Literally *rock-house*.

him that nothing very serious had happened to that young gentleman, whose clothes were thrown into the boat, and he himself tumbling about in a state of pleasant sensation in the still and crystal flood. It is rarely that a person of at all hardy habits may not bathe with pleasure in this latitude, especially where the water comes principally from the ocean: indeed, after a night passed in his clothes, in the close hold of a decked boat, and on the planks, Willoughby rightly imagined that it would be a luxury. It may, however, in the mean time, be remembered that it was the month of June: the mid-winter of the lands of the southern seas.

The skipper lit his two-inch pipe, black with many a blast, and rich with the essential oil of a quarter of a hundred weight of negrohead, and, sitting down on the deck, threw his legs over the side and watched the bather.

"You'll be just in time for Kable's breakfast," said he, at last, as Willoughby swam in. "Stop and have a feed with us if you like, though;—only there's nothing but some tea and white tommy, and that cold schnapper we had for supper off Barrenjueh. If you go ashore, you'll have 'lassions' of everything. He lives well, does young Reuben—as well as any settler about here."

"I shall go ashore," said Willoughby, "if you can spare a man to bring back the dingy."

"Oh, ay; to be sure. You're not going to run away with the young missis, I hope: she is the Daisy of the Bay."

"Young missis!" exclaimed Willoughby; "why I didn't know Mr. Kable was married. I took him to be a single man." For Reuben Kable had not mentioned having any sister, and his habitual acquaintance with sailors' jokes led Willoughby instinctively to interpret the phrase by its broadest meaning.

"Married! no: not he. They all say about here that he thinks nobody's good enough for him. I mean young Polly, his sister."

"Oh! is that it?" replied Willoughby, laughing. "I can't say, then, what I might do. If I want to cut off some of these nights in a quarter less than no time, I suppose you'll stow us away somewhere."

"Ay," said the skipper, joining in the joke, "only it's no use to speak for a cage for a bird till you've cotched it. Hollo, boy, give a hand here with the dingy."

The boy stood ready with the oar shipped astern by the time that Willoughby was dressed; and he, passing the little token of good-will which all orders and ranks of conveyancers love so well into the skipper's palm, stepped over the side into it, and departed.

His course was toward a fine square-sided tract of cultivated ground, abreast of the craft, except by about half a mile; which, on a sweeping shore, at some distance off seems nothing. It was about a quarter of a mile in length along the water-side, and about half as much in depth; the surface being an even and gradual rise from front to back. On the upper side, nearly or

quite in the middle, stood a bush cottage, with that appanage almost universal throughout the colony, as a protection from the sunbeams during the hottest period of the day—a verandah. The line of the clear ground at the further end followed the slight sweep of a deep and precipitous creek-bank; but at this end the line was cut straight up through the forest.* The season being that at which there is no crop on the ground, the dwelling-house, as well as the smallest buildings about it, was visible to its base. There was a rough bark-roofed barn behind one corner of the house, at the very edge of the standing timber, and behind the other, a couple of the common huts for working hands; and nearly at the extreme of the top line again, by the creek edge, so as to flank cattle by it in driving them in, was the stockyard, with its calf-pens, and a little yoking-yard; and inside the large yard the usual gallows, of some twelve or thirteen feet high, with a block and hook attached for hauling up a slaughtered bullock, during that process which is familiarly termed "taking his jacket off."

Reuben Kable's only housekeeper was his sister, a girl of eighteen;—nor had she now any stated companion of her own sex and age, except the daughter of an old couple two miles off, who came and remained with her during her brother's absence. Their parents had now been dead several years; and, until within the last twelvemonths, an aged woman, who had been her nurse from infancy, together with the old man, her husband, had lived on the farm. One of those peculiarities of determination which the declining intellect is sometimes found to manifest, had about so long since led the old man (who had always been a favourite servant, and treated accordingly) to remove to Mangrove Creek, one of the higher watercourses falling into Broken Bay, and commence settler himself. Since that period, not knowing of any other aged woman capable of supplying old Margaret Bradshaw's place, and indeed well knowing that they should find none whom they should regard with the same affection as the old nurse of their childhood, Reuben and Mary Kable had contented themselves to remain as Willoughby now found them.

Reuben Kable, the reader is already acquainted with. His sister was but little like him in anything but simplicity of character: that they both possessed; possibly deriving it as much from the tone of mind impressed upon them by the old nurse, as from natural tendency. One other quality, however, the brother and sister had in common—affection for each other. A stranger might easily have mistaken the sister for the young wife, as she bounded down the path of an evening to meet Reuben returning with the long duck-gun under his arm, or the oars on his shoulder; clasp-

* We shall trust most implicitly to our Australian friends to make allowance for any little variation from the present aspect of the locality that they may find in the above sketch. It is now several years since we visited that part of the colony, and enjoyed the pleasure of tumbling about in those placid waters, after a hot afternoon's ride from a dozen miles beyond the Blue-Gum Flat.

ing her arms round his waist, and hanging about him till they reached the hill-top, shaking and sinking her head, as. with his disengaged hand, he mischievously tangled the long, fine tresses she had so carefully arranged; then, as they drew near the door, bounding as rapidly in-doors to re-arrange them, and make sure that Jemmy—the old, pursy, barber-like convict, their only companion, whom they had made a cook of because they thought it a pity to put him to hard work, and "must have somebody,"—had everything ready for tea; and then, as her brother sat down opposite to her at the tea-table, springing across to Reuben, and with one of those soft and beautiful hands pressing either cheek, enfixing a kiss on his forehead: the thrill and sound of which put to flight all his gravity, and made him laugh for the first time throughout the day from the very depth of his chest. The dullest looker-on would have got so far as the hypothetical predicate, that if that young rustic beauty was not a wife, all had not yet become as it ought to be.

"There is many a true word spoken in jest," runs the proverb: but little did Willoughby Bracton surmise how particularly true was to prove the prophetic guess of the skipper. And as little did Mary Kable imagine whom she was speaking of, when, a little after sunrise that morning, she came in-doors and said to her brother, "I declare, Reuben, there's one of those mad fellows of sailors belonging to the *Little Bee*, swimming about this cold morning in the very middle of the bay." Whereupon Reuben, concluding that his own craft also must have come up to the wharf (which was hidden by the lower corner of the bush), put on his broad-brimmed straw-hat, and walked down to see: whilst Mary went in-doors to urge old Jemmy to make haste with the breakfast.

As he emerged from the short bush road on to the top of the little bluff, the first thing the Australian saw was the tapering mast of his craft; the second, the *Bee's* dingy shooting rapidly over to the point where he stood, with the boy standing in the stern, paddling, and a regular blue jacket sitting face forward on the thwart, to bestow his weight most advantageously for her progress; for the dingies carried by the lesser vessels of the musquito fleet are about the most ticklish things that stem the salt water.

Before the dingy reached the bank, Reuben recognised with surprise and pleasure Willoughby Bracton.

"I'm out of your debt now," said the young sailor, as the nose of the boat ran home against the broken grassy bank, where there was plenty of water just astern of the craft;—"my promise is kept."

"And just in time for breakfast," returned his friend, stretching out his long arm to Willoughby, as he bounded up, and giving him a tug that it required all his agility to prevent from terminating in an all-fours.

The men of his own schooner now began to tumble up from the hold at the sound of voices alongside, and Reuben, after getting

the report of their trip, and the Sydney invoices of the back cargo, invited his friend to proceed homeward. A whole pack of those fine dogs so serviceable in a bush life greeted their approach. The breed is one which, taking the greyhound as its basis, mingles with that of the lurcher, mastiff, and bull-dog in interminable variety; presenting generally, however, a dog of great speed and bone, and often first-rate scent, as well as sagacity. These noble animals are oftentimes to be seen about homesteads, lying by on the sick-list, cut almost to pieces in their savage struggles with the wolfish warregal of the bush, or by the goring talons of the kangaroo; and sometimes in a state of premature decay from the effects of fractures, and those many wounds whose remains are not only the bald seams on the skin, but other and deeper left upon the nervous system, rendering the animal perpetually sleepy, or irritable, according to the bias of natural temperament.

The loud bay of the pack, as they suddenly dashed off at the alarm uttered by the first who happened to discern the stranger, informed Mary Kable that her brother was not returning alone; and she hastened across to the parlour window to ascertain who it might be. Her brother and his guest were walking rapidly and familiarly up the path, side by side, stopping abruptly now and then, and looking as Reuben pointed in various directions. Her brother was carrying the stranger's monkey-jacket, which, as the leader of the pack bounded forward at Willoughby, he made use of to tumble the dog heels over head with. It chanced to be Mary's favourite old dog—one that had licked her face in the cradle, and fondled her in her childhood; and she was angry with Reuben, and grateful to the stranger for holding out his hand to the discomfited "Tony." The faithful dog slunk away, carrying the rest of the pack gradually off; and trotting back, with frequently-reverted heads and stifled growls, to the top of the hill, they posted themselves all round Mary, as she came out and stood in front of the verandah.

"Reuben, how could you knock poor old Tony over in that way?" she exclaimed, before the young men were near enough for Kable to introduce his friend.

"Better," said Reuben, "for a dog to have a tumble than a man a bite, especially from that old ruffian: he always makes his teeth meet. He's got a way of snapping, Mr. Bracton, like a native dog: he doesn't bite: and his teeth, old as he is, are sure to go jam through whatever he aims at. This is my sister: she's a very good girl; but she'd sooner see you with a great tear in your arm or leg than have a finger laid on Tony. Look at him now; how he stands grinning at me, as much as to say, 'Touch me if you dare, now I am beside my mistress!' Go to kennel, sir. Off! None of your old soldiering."

"No, no: let him stop, Reuben. He won't hurt Mr. Bracton, now."

"Will you be bail for him?"

"Yes."

"I, who am the principal party concerned, Miss Kable," said Willoughby, "am perfectly satisfied with the security. Indeed, Mr. Kable interfered in my behalf almost needlessly: dogs never bite me. There's not an animal in the world, even man himself, that feels and is put down by a strong manifestation of contempt so readily as the dog."

"Then I am sure," said Mary, laughing, "my brother ought to have managed Tony without the pilot-coat. But come, brother; come, Mr. Bracton, breakfast is ready."

As she spoke, the Australian maid led the way forward into the little breakfast-parlour. The room, which was furnished in a genteel domestic way, not gaudily, looked out upon the glittering face of the bay, and was full of the rich, mellow lustre shed into a shady spot by a large surface of reflection. Three or four boats were now urging their way from various farms on the shores towards the little crafts at anchor, which were expected to have brought down packages for them from Sydney; and the hills opposite lay under the full light of the sun, now rising immediately behind the house.

The dress of the young girl was as simple as the life she led; her gown of fine cotton print, of a small pattern, with collar of its own material, fitted nicely her compact and shapely form, and fell in ample folds to her well-formed and neatly-shod feet. And, under the lace frill that encircled her small neck, impelled by the more than ordinary chillness of the morning, she had hastily tied a silken kerchief of pale blue, fastening it, in unconscious imitation of her brother, with a sailor's knot. She was of the medium height, and of those delicate and slender proportions which subsist in connexion with the highest degree of activity in woman, whilst the mirthful and almost childlike confidence of her manner imparted to all she did and said an unperceived but irresistible appeal for a like return.

The breakfast which appeared upon the table did fullest justice to the pre-commendations of the skipper of the *Bee*. There was true bush tea, with cream and new eggs, white as the driven snow; butter in pats, neat as the hostess's own little hand; a broad dish of rumpsteaks, steaming hot, and damper, white and light as it could have come from the oven of the most accomplished baker, and for shape a perfect picture.

Willoughby, almost unconsciously, as he took a deliberate survey of the domestic department of his friend's homestead, gave utterance to an expression of surprise at its neat and comfortable trim.

"It was very different, I assure you," said Mary, "twelve months ago, when I came from school. Reuben, I must tell you, has been a bit of a tyrant to me in two or three instances; I wanted to begin housekeeping two years before I could persuade him to let me."

"Really, Miss Kable, he appears to have hit upon exactly the right time."

"Indeed," said Reuben Kable. "I took no responsibility in the matter. I simply asked her schoolmistress whether she was fit to leave school; and when that lady said yes, I was very glad to have her at home with me. A pretty job I had to get her there at first; it wasn't likely I was going to have it for nothing. The fact is, Mr. Bracton, I used her so, when she was little, to having me for a stock-horse to hunt the pigs out of the ground, that, when she came to be ten or eleven years of age, I used to come home and find her, and the young damsel she has to help her in the household affairs, with the bridle on one of my horses, and riding him all about the bush. Why, you know, I was obliged to do something. Old Margaret was lame, so that she used to get away from her; and what I said to her always went in at one ear and out at the other. So I found her her match at last."

"Schoolmistresses are no good," said Mary, with an evident manifestation of the antiquity of the dogma in her mind; "I knew all that is of any use to me before I saw one. At all events, I learned nothing worth learning but music: I could sew as well seven years ago as I can now; and as to French, of what use is that? I am not going to France."

"Well," said her brother, "if for nothing else the money was well bestowed in associating you for a few years with other young ladies, instead of your riding, along with that other lass, like two little Amazons, about the bush. But never mind the past. Find us a couple of ducks and a plum-pudding for dinner, or something of the sort, and you shall have it all your own way about the schoolmistress; Mr. Bracton and I want to have a stroll round the ground. Here's a piece of capital Brazil, Willoughby, which I got, in spite of queen and constitution, from one of the vessels from the Brazils. Fill; and we'll smoke as we go. But, oh! here's the side-saddle coming."

"Is it not a sweet one, sir?" said Mary, as she exhibited a natty, little saddle, such as ladies use.

"What cunning little monkeys they are," exclaimed Reuben, after the handsome little side-saddle had been duly admired, and they were on their way down the path toward the water. "That was meant, you know, as a protest that she doesn't ride Amazon-fashion now."

"I suppose so," said Willoughby, laughing.

A very pleasant morning succeeded. An hour was spent at the water-side; where the hands, having got out their few packages from Sydney for the house and for various other farms around, were beginning to run in a load of house-timber through the stern-port: the common way of loading many of these small craft, in which the hold is only thus accessible for long pieces of bush stuff. Afterwards, running the water's edge down to the south-side line, they followed it all round through the bush toward the creek, which bounded the farm on the north. The back line—running just clear of immense masses of broken rock that had shot down from the mountain, and lay scattered about,

gray and desolate looking, and covered the ground all about with the sandy detritus, into which they had for ages been mouldering —presented an assurance of solitariness on that side not to be mistaken. On crossing the creek, however, and turning toward the water's edge, they again came upon a scope of clear ground.

Unlike Reuben Kable's, it was situated in the midst of the bush, and at some distance from the water-side. No smoke, as they approached, was seen to curl up from the roof, no dogs ran barking forth to meet the strangers; the fences were broken; only grass and weeds were growing on the cultivated ground; marsh-mallows almost hid the stockyard, whilst, in front of the house, a mob of seven or eight wild cattle were warily feeding, and, at the first yelp of the dogs, plunged furiously away through the broken panels into the bush.

"A forsaken farm?" inquired Willoughby.

"Yes; and very foolishly forsaken. There was a murder committed behind in the mountains yonder, by one convict upon another, as they were going to hospital together; the inducement being a solitary sovereign, that the old man who was the victim had got to supply himself with a few luxuries beyond the hospital diet; and ever since the tale has been that the murdered old man makes nocturnal peregrinations down to this spot. It was from this farm that he set out: he had been assigned to the owner for several years; and the report was (after his death: I never heard it before) that he had got together a good bit of money, and, when he went to the hospital, had left all but the one sovereign planted (or hidden) under some stump on the farm. However, whether it was only the owner's conscience smote him (for he was a hard man), or whether he actually saw something, he bolted in the course of a few weeks, and has been in Sydney ever since. There's one thing about it, the ground on this side of the creek is by no means first-rate soil: it lies low and cold."

"I was thinking," said Willoughby, "I might perhaps get it at a bargain."

"Do you mean to have another farm beside that at the Morrumbidgee?"

"That is not my property. Wherever I settle, I must have a piece of ground, like yours, on the water-side. I have been envying you ever since you first described to me the situation of this little farm of yours, as we rode to Manaroo."

"There is only half of it mine; the other half is my sister's. But there is some government land on the other side of ours. How much money do you mean to lay out?

"I have about nine hundred pounds of my own."

"You'll do no good with so much here, unless you mean taking to the axe and plough, and having a regular agricultural farm. This is no sheep country, nor is it a good part for cattle: they get into the mountains, and the breed degenerates. Allow me to say, however, that nothing would give me greater pleasure than to have you for a neighbour."

Here the conversation dropped so far as the particular subject was concerned, on which the young men happened to have reached so decidedly coincident an opinion.

Mary Kable applied herself to her culinary duties that day with more than ordinary steadiness, in more than ordinary silence, taking more than ordinary care that everything should be without fault. Toward the close of the afternoon, Reuben was compelled to retreat to a more quiet apartment, to prepare his letters, and the account of the boat's load for Sidney. Mary, her morning dress exchanged for one of brown silk, with a deep rich lace collar, took out her work, and sat down with it in the light of the window, for the sun was sinking into a beclouded horizon; and Willoughby, who had been sitting on the same side, instinctively drew back his chair, and turned towards her. Mary had now become the sole object of Willoughby's attention; and his mere mental approbation of her passed rapidly into intense feeling. For a few moments she was unconscious of the earnest gaze that was fixed upon her; then, though she lifted not her eyes, the second-sight of womanhood began to warn her. At first a little anger shot through her heart; then a slight sense of shame came over her; and then a feeling of joy. With the joy came back her self-possession, and woman's consciousness of her power, and the impulse to take a bit of mirthful revenge.

"What was it you were saying last, sir?" asked Mary, as she moved the hand hither and thither, that expanded the stocking-foot as if to examine her work critically in several positions.

"Last!" exclaimed Willoughby. "My dear Miss Kable, pray forgive me; really I have behaved very rudely.—What a very dark afternoon it has become!"

"A little while before Reuben went out, you were beginning to tell me about your mother and sisters: I think you said you had two sisters."

"One sister, about your own age, and a cousin, whom we have called our sister till we have almost forgotten that she is not so."

"Whom I shall have the honour—the pleasure, some of these days, if you come to live near us, of seeing as Mrs. Bracton, junior," said Mary, as gaily as she could.

"Oh dear, no! My cousin and I have been joined in holy wedlock by our neighbours ever since we were children: but there seems," added Willoughby, with a remarkably good-humoured sort of contentment, "very little probability of our entering into the holy state."

"Then you don't like one another?"

"Oh yes! Katharine is a delightful creature in every respect: but she has always maintained that she could not bear to marry a sailor; so I never troubled myself to fall in love with her."

"But why was that? I mean, why will she not marry a sailor?"

"She says she should live in a perpetual fright."

"Well, but surely there must be sailors as well as other people,

Mr. Bracton. I don't think that's fair. Reuben is half his time on the water, and I never feel frightened. At least, I am frightened only when it blows very hard."

"I wonder you don't feel very lonely here by yourself when Reuben is away."

"I have a young woman to come and stay with me, and then there's the old cook, and all the men at the huts close by."

"And Tony?"

"Oh yes, dear old Tony! He always takes possession of the hearth-rug as soon as my brother goes away. I really think he knows when Reuben is going to start: he begins to assume a sort of command over all the other dogs directly he sees the quart-pot and hobbles strapped to the saddle."

"Doesn't this haunted house make you feel uncomfortable?"

"No; I never think about it. Till the ghost comes to me, I shall never trouble myself about him. My greatest loneliness was when we came to have our old nurse no longer; we had been used to her so many years, that she was become a second mother to us. Dear old Margaret taught us both to read; and taught me to sew and to cook, and indeed everything of a household sort. Reuben was quite young when our parents died, and I was a mere child. She promised my mother never to forsake us till we could take care of ourselves; and she performed her promise most faithfully. I never could think how she could come to be transported."

"Was she then a convict originally?"

"Oh, yes! Did you not understand that before? Poor Margaret! when first I remember her, she used to sit on a Sunday, when there was little to do, and cry for hours together. When she was transported, they took her child from her—was not that cruel?—a fine little fellow of four years old. She was assigned to us immediately from the ship, and my mother did everything she could to secure the conveyance of her letters safely; but Margaret could never hear any tidings of the child. Perhaps it died, and they would not send her word, thinking her badly enough off already; still, it would have been better than such suspense. But some people are very ignorant in such things; and others are very hard-hearted. However, by degrees she took to Reuben. It was a sad affair to her when old John would rent a piece of ground at Mangrove Creek. And Reuben, I believe, will never be happy till he gets her back."

"Why did they not have a pice of ground of your brother?" inquired Willoughby.

"The old man, it seems, wanted to sell rum on the sly; and here there are no customers: there, there are plenty. Mangrove Creek is a sad, wild place in that respect. I am sure it will never suit Margaret."

Again Reuben Kable made his appearance, and a pleasant tea-time followed. A few further words, which passed in the course of the evening, determined the direction of future events.

"You decide, then," said the Australian, "to return to Sydney by this boat?"

"Yes," replied Willoughby; "I think it desirable. I cannot call the bargain, as yet, complete; and as you consider the sheep so well worth what is asked for them, the sooner I make the purchase secure the better."

"Very well. I'll tell one of the hands to come up and call you, if there's a wind. At all events, there will not be one now till full flood—about three o'clock in the morning. Mary, don't let our friend go without something for his dinner, if the wind does not carry them up to Port Jackson. Now, I am about to make a proposal to you, Mr. Bracton: meantime, I wish my views not to control yours at all, for I never like running the risk of persuading another in money matters; but I shall be pleased if you should happen to coincide in opinion with me. I have been thinking, for some time past, of buying a larger boat, and trading with her on the various arms of Broken Bay. It is on account of the numerous small arms into which it breaks, that the inlet bears that name; and on the banks of all these arms there are located settlers of the second and third rank, almost innumerable. Many of them keep timber-getting establishments, and supply Sydney with building stuff; all grown corn and wheat; many cultivate and cure tobacco: so there is import for the capital. As to export—you see how we live in the bush—a very large amount of stores is required from Sydney for this locality; but most of the skippers of the boats already in the trade are quite unacquainted with the settlers. Indeed, it cannot be otherwise, for they often do not stay in the trade beyond a few months. On the other hand, I know every settler of any standing, from the Green Hills in the Hawkesbury to Barrenjueh; and what sort of 'pay' he is. Now, if it suits you to join me in a snug little sloop, and sail her yourself—by buying all the stuff we load with, and so loading on our own account, and your selling again on Sydney wharf without an intermediate agent; and then again making all the purchases of stores for back freight with cash—we can make a very good thing of it. And if you should conclude to buy a section of land next ours, I'll look after the felling and burning off, and fencing and cropping of it for you, 'free-gratis,' as my countrymen say. What do you say?"

"My brother has lost two boats already: it's a most dangerous run," remarked Mary, in a plaintive tone, without lifting her eyes from her work.

"Lost two boats? I? Not one!" exclaimed her brother. "Two lubbers of skippers lost 'em for me, if you like."

"Well, I mean that, Reuben. You know how many do get lost, one way and another, between here and Sydney Heads."

"Any time," said the Australian, with that rigid curl of the upper lip, and iron set of his ivory features, which marked the passage through his mind of deep vexation,—"Any time that Mr.

Bracton think's it's likely to blow too hard, I'll run her the trip myself, and he can take a spell. Oh, Polly, Polly!" he added, as he jumped up and took three or four long strides about the room, and strove to laugh away his irritation, "you are a contrary little thing. Now, what are Willoughby's and my affairs to you? Spoilt yourself, you are only fit to spoil everything else."

"No, no, Kable," interposed Willoughby, rising and pushing him back into his chair. "She has not spoilt this: just the contrary. I shall do what you propose."

"My beautiful brother," said Mary, as she stepped across into his arms, "what are you so angry with me for? There, now," she continued, as after an instant she wiped her brother's face with her handkerchief, "your head is all in a steam of perspiration again in a minute. That's always the way, sir, when he gets into one of his pets with me. You should not do so, Reuben: you know you are always ill for two or three hours afterwards. Come, I'll sing to you."

Mary hastened to the instrument. But on the occasion there was particularly little need for it: the two young men were already quietly exchanging smiles. Either from the appositeness of the subject, or to awaken another train of strong associations in her brother's mind, Mary Kable selected a little song of the old nurse's which was a favourite with him, and to which she had added a bass herself. After the few first notes, however, she paused, and asked Reuben if he preferred that one. "You know it is in the dialect of the north of England, where Margaret came from. Will Mr. Bracton understand it?"

"I was a good deal in and out of the harbours on that coast when I was a boy," said Willoughby.

"Then you'll like it. Sing it, Polly. 'The Fisherman's Widow;' isn't that the title?"

"No, brother; '*The Maniac Mother.*'"

Look'st* thou, my bairn! no clouds—but a moon!
Feyther† or friend thou hast never a yan;‡
Look'st, honie, yon—but it maun§ be too soon—
They say that thy feyther cometh again.‖

Look'st thou, sweet bairn!—'twas here he loved me;—
Red and white hedge-roses mingle and kiss;
Look'st honie, now!—he comes to love thee;
Thou art mine—thou art mine, and I'm seere¶ thou art his.

Hist thou, dear bairn! or we never shall hear:—
I know it—I know it; thou art thin clad and cold;
Nay, honie, hist! I'm cold too, I'm seere,
But a fisherman's boy should be bonnie and bold.

Come, honie, kiss! What so cold and so stiff!
See, see, the boat's filling; he calls thee and me:
'Tis his own calm shout in the roar of the reef:—
We'll away o'er the cliff, through the air to the sea.

* Look (imper.) † Father. ‡ One. § Must. ‖ As an apparition. ¶ Sure.

About half-past three on the following morning, one of the hands knocked impatiently at Willoughby's window, under the verandah, at the back of the cottage, "Fair wind, sir!—beginning to stir pretty fresh; please to make haste." On stepping aboard, a little covered wicker basket was pointed out to him as having been sent down by the young mistress for the passenger: it contained a dish of cold beef-steaks and bread; tea and sugar tied up in little square bags of new longcloth (evidently fresh from the needle); a bottle of milk, a bottle of wine, and a little pot of preserves. The wind was northerly:—a run to the southward;—a short reach out to sea;—down the coast;—and Sydney Heads.

CHAPTER IX.

Beck's tactics.—Shearing and Harvest.—Keeping Christmas in the Bush.—John Thomas and Biddy.—The Jewess.—Beck's trap for the Welshman.

Willoughby Bracton having fulfilled the object of his journey down the country, once more proceeded to the Rocky Springs. The gratification of the family at his return amongst them was, however, sorely marred by the announcement of the plan he had adopted for pursuing his own future fortunes. Although, as he had told Reuben Kable, he had all along felt an increasing repugnance to an entire renunciation of the sea, and to a final separation from scenery he was so long accustomed and so partial to, he had never made any mention of his feelings to his relatives, or hinted the probability that he would do otherwise than continue permanently with them. His natural character, like his mother's, tended mainly to pursue unpretendingly and steadily that which presented itself immediately to him as the duty of the time: educationally following his father, he had become a bold and skilful seaman.

For the present, also, however numerous might have been his thoughts, he said nothing of Mary Kable: Reuben *alone* had to bear all the odium of his unwelcome change. Katharine only, as if by instinct, appeared to comprehend the whole matter: she argued that Willoughby's attached friend, and the frank and able benefactor of their fortunes at so critical a juncture, must be neither a worthless nor an ordinary man; and her protest alone was interposed between the brief, but sharp, reprobatory remark of her relatives and the unknown. For the first time in her life she felt, with pain, that it was possible for the benefactors of her childhood, and the endeared friends of so many years,—for even them to be injurious and faulty, as well as others of our kind. Happily for Katharine, whose moral decisions on any matter were intuitive, none of her family were infected by that littleness of mind that goes out of its way to carp at the absent. The singular precision of her judgments, also, and the almost ideal beauty of he

a remarkable trait of this singular man's character: rather than quell the natural bias of his disposition to thrift, even as the mere agent of another; and rather than relinquish the inclination to secure himself applause, he risked the additional peril for the sake of establishing a reserve team; and great as was the peril, he continued to risk it with impunity.

He was not himself, however, aware of the peculiar circumstance that saved him. The bullock-driver had actually seen calves marked with Beck's brand in several instances, and more than once with Morgan Brown's brand; and remembered them as belonging to the Rocky Springs' herd, and had even tried to drive them out of Morgan Brown's herd from a distant part of that stockman's run, where they were as much as possible kept for security. The Welshman had seen some branded with Martin Beck's

and others with Morgan Brown's **M B**; the circle having been adopted by the black to distinguish his brand from Brown's. Still, he entertained no suspicion of what was going on.

It is customary with settlers in these colonies to brand occasional beasts for various members of their families, and such are generally the best, and female cattle; so as to lay for those individuals the foundation of a little herd of their own. The Welshman, in his simplicity, concluded that these were the respective brands of Marianna Bracton and of her mother, whose name was known to be the same: they were just such of the young cattle as would have been selected in such a case; and if he could have run them home himself, he would have done so, out of good will to his employer. But to give Martin Beck, whose duty it was to keep the herd together, the information where they were to be pitched upon, was a stretch of courtesy beyond John Thomas's inclination. "Let him find them or lose them," he said to himself: "if he lose them, his reputation as a stock-keeper must suffer; if he find them, it will have been at the cost of some labour." He made atonement to his own conscience by determining to keep an eye on the gathering in the stock-yard when next muster-day came, and if they were still absent, then he would inform Lieutenant Bracton where, to Beck's discredit, they had been allowed to stray for some months. Hence, Beck was neither aware of the impending danger of discovery, nor of his chance of escape. He knew that anything the Welshman might detect, would go on by the maid to the mistress, and from Miss Bracton to her father; but as evidently nothing had reached Lieutenant Bracton, he concluded that the Welshman knew of nothing prejudicial to make known.

Thus, Beck worked on in good heart, and everything seemed to progress and to flourish under his hand: the sheep were stationed with consummate judgment of feed and water, and salu-

brity of position and scope of run; the stations were effectively built; and the men well selected for their particular duties. Three huts were up; and all the fencing made sound, both of the stock-yard and the cultivated ground; and a dairy was dug down into a steep part of the hill side, and roofed with bark, laid on rafters and covered with earth. A new weather-boarded cottage for the family, with four good rooms, and verandah in front and behind, was in progress on the point of the hill; but so placed as to leave clear the site for the more substantial edifice hereafter; and a rich crop of wheat, sufficient for the whole consumption of the establishment, waved in the warm summer sun, and was just fit for the sickle. The proprietor might have scrutinized the progress of many farms before he could have found one where the same number of hands had done so much and so well in the same number of months. Altogether, Beck felt in a good humour with himself; and, though he could never forgive the Welshman's indomitable and pertinacious defiance of his control, or quite lose sight of the danger he stood in through him, he as yet retorted rather with contempt than with malevolence.

Meantime, though ignorant of Beck's actual practises, the Welshman was becoming a much more serious adversary than he supposed. John Thomas, having been acquainted for years with this part of the country, was consequently acquainted with the hutkeepers; and the hutkeepers were also acquainted with their various stockmen's character, and partially with their movements. Among them it was well known that Morgan Brown never "missed a chance," if such fell in his way; and when it became known that Martin Beck was often at Morgan's hut, and out on the runs with him, the conclusion arose spontaneously that Martin Beck also was not altogether "on the square" in the matter of cattle. From the hutkeepers, this impression had been further communicated to their old acquaintance, John Thomas; who, when out in search of his bullocks, occasionally visited them: but that severity of discipline exercised under the convict system over ticket-of-leave holders sealed his lips from the utterance of any suspicions to his employer. An occasional vague hint had sometimes escaped him to some of the men in the hut; but it was too vague and intangible to be communicated: it was not even fully understood; nor, indeed, did the Welshman mean to render it so. Beck was understood to be a free-born native; and, had he been able to prove at the police court any slanderous remarks of John Thomas's, the result would have probably been the forfeiture of the Welshman's ticket, and his consequent retrocession into a state of simple penal servitude.

The shearing season arrived, and passed; and the word was heard going round that the wheat was ready for the sickle. In a few days more the last load rolled heavily up to the hill, and crowned the well-formed stack; and to each of the band of bronze-faced reapers, as they came one by one up from their hut to receive it, a brimming goblet was handed by the fair Katharine:

for Willoughby was by this time deeply engaged at Broken Bay, and Marianna had betaken herself to Biddy and the dairy, leaving to her cousin the more strictly domestic matters.

A good deal of work of one kind and another, but all such as must be done in the particular season, or left undone altogether, yet remained to be got through; and Lieutenant Bracton had proposed to the overseer to induce the men to put off their harvest home merrymaking, to save time, till Christmas-day. But Beck was not by any means high in favour with some of the hands, especially the more independent strollers who had been taken on during the press of work; and being consequently apprehensive of not succeeding in carrying the point, he had evaded the task by suggesting that his employer had better speak to the men himself. Now it happened that both Lieutenant Bracton and his overseer were absent together at the very time the request should have been made; otherwise, the holiday once begun, it would have come too late; Katharine, therefore, took the duty upon herself. Among the casual hands was one of better bearing than the rest; and she waited for his turn to come, to make the appeal to him. His name on the certificate of freedom he showed was Russell; but he had got the title of "the lagger" (or sailor) among the men: he associated with none of his equals, and seemed to shun contact with his superiors. With a fine bold person and a noble brow he appeared the wreck of some tremendous fortune. The string of applicants ended, and "the lagger" came not; and Katharine, firm to her purposes as she was womanly in her choice of them, had to send for him.

"Why, Russell, you had nearly been missed."

"After I have earned nearly ten pounds on the farm, Miss, a glass of grog is neither here nor there."

"Well, but you must have one, Russell, to drink Mr. Bracton's health. Mr. Bracton would be so much obliged if the men could put off their harvest-home feast till Christmas, and then they might take two or three days for it; if they like. Will you ask them?"

"Certainly, Miss. It shall be done."

And it was; for in half an hour all the hands employed on settled jobs were busy at them.

At length came Christmas-day and the harvest-home feast together. A holiday is never an early day with working hands; to them rest is the pleasure that makes the first demand. By seven o'clock, only two or three were up, out of about a dozen, which the business of the season had gathered in the men's hut. One of these was down at the creek washing. Another, one of those patient workers who will rather work for the common good than do nothing, is coming down the hill yonder with a log of wood on his shoulder, to add to the heap he is making in front of the hut door for the Christmas roast. The sun is just in sight above the main mountain at the head of the nook; the air is full of a warm light, and the little mist in it after the dewy night makes that light

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The shearing season arrived, and passed; and the word was heard going round that the wheat was ready for the sickle. In a few days more the last load rolled heavily up to the hill, and crowned the well-formed stack; and to each of the band of bronze-faced reapers, as they came one by one up from their hut to receive it, a brimming goblet was handed by the fair Katharine:

for Willoughby was by this time deeply engaged at Broken Bay, and Marianna had betaken herself to Biddy and the dairy, leaving to her cousin the more strictly domestic matters.

A good deal of work of one kind and another, but all such as must be done in the particular season, or left undone altogether, yet remained to be got through; and Lieutenant Bracton had proposed to the overseer to induce the men to put off their harvest home merrymaking, to save time, till Christmas-day. But Beck was not by any means high in favour with some of the hands, especially the more independent strollers who had been taken on during the press of work; and being consequently apprehensive of not succeeding in carrying the point, he had evaded the task by suggesting that his employer had better speak to the men himself. Now it happened that both Lieutenant Bracton and his overseer were absent together at the very time the request should have been made; otherwise, the holiday once begun, it would have come too late; Katharine, therefore, took the duty upon herself. Among the casual hands was one of better bearing than the rest; and she waited for his turn to come, to make the appeal to him. His name on the certificate of freedom he showed was Russell; but he had got the title of "the lagger" (or sailor) among the men: he associated with none of his equals, and seemed to shun contact with his superiors. With a fine bold person and a noble brow he appeared the wreck of some tremendous fortune. The string of applicants ended, and "the lagger" came not; and Katharine, firm to her purposes as she was womanly in her choice of them, had to send for him.

"Why, Russell, you had nearly been missed."

"After I have earned nearly ten pounds on the farm, Miss, a glass of grog is neither here nor there."

"Well, but you must have one, Russell, to drink Mr. Bracton's health. Mr. Bracton would be so much obliged if the men could put off their harvest-home feast till Christmas, and then they might take two or three days for it; if they like. Will you ask them?"

"Certainly, Miss. It shall be done."

And it was; for in half an hour all the hands employed on settled jobs were busy at them.

At length came Christmas-day and the harvest-home feast together. A holiday is never an early day with working hands; to them rest is the pleasure that makes the first demand. By seven o'clock, only two or three were up, out of about a dozen, which the business of the season had gathered in the men's hut. One of these was down at the creek washing. Another, one of those patient workers who will rather work for the common good than do nothing, is coming down the hill yonder with a log of wood on his shoulder, to add to the heap he is making in front of the hut door for the Christmas roast. The sun is just in sight above the main mountain at the head of the nook; the air is full of a warm light, and the little mist in it after the dewy night makes that light

like a chastened but almost palpable glory, which seems as if you could wave your hand in and feel it: all is so still that you may hear the whirr of the milk into the milking-pail all the way from the stock-yard.

Two or three more of the hands turn out of the hut: the third one erected by the overseer, with a view to the crowd of hands at the busy season; the other is forsaken, save by one sulky old man, who likes to be by himself. The hut has been built, with Beck's usual judgment, in such a style as will allow of it being used (if floored) for thrashing in, or any other purpose of a barn, when the supernumeraries are gone: its side slabs are nine feet out of the ground; its area is barn-like, and unencumbered with any divisions, and the only chimney is an unroofed end.

Now the whole mob are up; one or two only are absent, washing themselves: the rest are all smoking round the fire, some standing, others sitting on short blocks cut transversely from small trees. Along the front of the fire are ranged ten or a dozen tin quart-pots of water for tea. The wood-getter comes in, and being already warmed by his own industry, goes to another part of the hut.—"Come, Dick, here's room at the fire; only fetch the tea-bag along with you, for the pots are beginning." At these seasons it is often the practice for all to mess together, as ration is dispensed almost unlimitedly.

Breakfast over, the business of the day begins. Dick is constituted barber, and good-naturedly goes over all chins. Meantime, the inquiry is heard, "I say, who's to make the pudding? It ought to be in the pot by this." Yonder steps forth a man, nicknamed "the dandy," just fit to be a cook, with no superfluous fat for the warmth to act upon: a perfect lath, standing full six feet high without his shoes, in white shirt and white drill trousers both incalculably patched. The dandy selects a little black-visaged Irishman for his mate.

"You've got nothin' in this here hut to make a puddin' in: not a single dish big enough to do at three times."

"Blood an' tare an' ouns, mate!" says the little sallow visage, "make it in the bucket."

The dandy, setting that vessel in readiness in the middle of the floor, gives his mate directions to go to the creek for a bucket of water.

"Dandy," murmurs the easy voice of a contemplative man, who sits smoking behind the fire, with his elbows on his knees, and his chin and short pipe on his hands, "you'd best give that bucket a sloosh out, for I seen it half-full of soap-sudsy water just now."

"I wish I'd catch anybody washing in the bucket," says the dandy, now full of the importance of his office; "I'd make him drink every drop on it."

"It's the Welshman, I think," cries one of those untiring wags, who are the pests of all sober society.

The dandy, therefore, says no more; for, though the wantonly-libelled man is not in sight, he may be just outside within sound, and the dandy is conscious that there would be some difficulty in

making John Thomas drink two table-spoonfuls. The sallow-visage, however, now arriving with the water, the bucket is duly purified.

Fifteen pounds of flour, a dozen pounds of plums, about half as much currants, half a pound of ground allspice, a quantity of candied lemon-peel, cut in pieces about the size of a man's thumb, and abundance of suet chopped a little smaller, are at length, between the two buckets, mixed into a batter; not without almost a battle to make the little sallow-visage go and cut a sapling to stir it with, instead of the handle of his axe, which he was about to use. The pudding-bag is yet wanting: what is to be done? A true socialist gives his duck frock, which, when sewed well together along the bottom, just contains the savoury mixture, that fills the garment up to the front opening; it being then sewn across, the monster pudding is complete.

"Where's your pot, lads?" inquires the dandy.

"Oh, we must get the cove to lend us the big pot they have for sheep-washing," is the answer.

A deputation is accordingly dispatched; the grant is obtained, and the immense three-legged iron crock is brought down, slung on a pole on two men's shoulders; and being filled with water is placed over the fire, which is well supplied with fuel. It boils at length, and in they tumble the enormous pudding.

"Who's going to mind this pudding?"

"Dandy will."

"Dandy wont: Dandy's done his share."

"Well, somebody must."

"Tell us something we don't know."

"Here comes the Welshman: he's done nothing yet."

"Ay, he's the lad. Come John; and while you're looking on, tell us how you got lagged."

"Why," said John Thomas, looking round with a serious and quiet self-esteem, as he walked in, putting a new thong on his whip; "I was only catch a bird in the mountain, this side of St. Asaph, and the squire sent me to prison. But she do herself no good: she die in six months after. I hear about it before I come off. It is a shame! What is it in a bird to send a man to prison for, and make him come here?"

"Ah! there must have been something more than that, John," retorted the last speaker.

"No, I tell you: I never do one single thieve in all my life but that bird. She was a little thing, too; not so big as my hand."

"You musn't come that, John," interposed the wag. "Wasn't you up at the police-office in Sydney, last time you was down the country, about a lady's pocket-handkerchief?"

"Ay," added another; "and a little girl's bread and butter, as she was going to school?"

"I tell you, my man, I never take anything in my life from any other man but that bird; and I 'ood not stand to see any man rob another man."

"Do you mean to say," inquired a third, "that if you saw me coming out of the captain's stores with a piece of beef or a bottle of grog, you'd split?"

"I 'ood make you put it down; or else I 'ood call the captain."

"What! if I was to give you half?"

"I 'ood not have it."

At this identical juncture, a voice was heard at the door, where the figure of Biddy appeared.

"Is Shaun Thomas here? The masther wants you, Shaun."

"Faith, an' he is," answered one.

"Come in, Biddy!" cried another.

"Ay, come in, Biddy," added the wag; "John wants you."

"Here, Biddy! Biddy!" shouted half a dozen voices at once; "come in, come in! John Thomas wants you. He says you're to come in."

"Biddy looked; but as John did not exactly appear to be either saying or meaning anything of the sort, she merely uttered the regulation "Anamondyoul!" and "Come, Shaun, make haste; it's something about the beef," and hastened away.

The Welshman lingered a few seconds, to avoid provoking a fresh burst of raillery by walking up side by side with Biddy; and then, with an indignant valediction in his own tongue, sufficiently intelligible by the tone in which it was uttered, obeyed the summons.

"The Welshman nobs it up well," said one. "The mistress talks and laughs with him as she doesn't with anybody else."

"And he's a regular favourite with Miss Marianna," said another. "He carries all her letters over to the township to that young Jewess she's so fond of."

"Do you think it's to the Jewess she sends all them letters?" ejaculated a third. "I should think *not*. Take my word, most of 'em goes over to the other side of the green."

"What! to the Court-House?"

"Ay, to be sure; to the new superintendent of police."

"Oh, he's got nothing but his salary—not above two hundred a-year, or three, at most. Do you think she'd have him?"

"He's a fine handsome young fellow, though; but terrible sharp where he takes against a man."

"Then that's just what Miss Marianna would be, if she had the power," said another. "I know she's a regular sharp one."

"Well," said the considerate man, "it's just right, then, that she should get into the hands of a police magistrate: if she turns out too jolly, he can clap her into the cells for a night. Gammon that lock-up, isn't cold of a winter night: just the place for a little lady like her when she gets too obscrophulous."

"Here's the Welshman coming down," exclaimed one who had just looked out, as he hastily turned in again, "with pretty near half a bullock on his shoulder!"

All hands hastened out to look. "Where did you get that, Taffy?"—"Whose is that, Welshman?" was heard again and

again, before the bearer of this valuable contribution to the hut's stores was able to give a reply.

"The captain give us that for our dinner," he replied, at last, as several assisted to take the immense piece of meat off his shoulder, and place it on a sheet of bark in the middle of the floor.

"Well," said the considerate man, after a deliberate inspection of the beef; "there must be very nigh a hundred weight of meat there—boggins for a whole week: a very pretty present, lads. We must drink the governor's health first, after dinner."

"I'll lay any money," said another, "Miss Katharine got it for us."

"Why not Miss Marianna?" sharply inquired another; for Katharine was by no means in entire possession of the popular suffrages. "I'm sure Miss Marianna's as good as Miss Katharine."

"They'll both do," said the considerate man, now getting into better humour every minute; "only, you see, Miss Katharine likes to go walking up the hill with her book, and Miss Marianna is fonder of a little life and fun. But they'll both do: I've seen worse."

John Thomas could only say that Miss Katharine, as storekeeper, had delivered it to him on the captain's message, and Miss Bracton had come in and given him a "regular stiffer" of rum to help him to carry it down. The meat was speedily divided into portions, some to be kept, others to be roasted; and thus all the viands were in progress of preparation for the Christmas dinner.

Meantime, Morgan Brown added himself to the company. It was a day that could not be got over without a bout at the keg; but he did not happen to be "flush" enough with money to go to the township; and he knew he could knock up nothing like a drinking match with Martin, who abhorred rum and rum-drinkers in his heart—only employing the one or tolerating the other to serve his grand purpose of money-getting. Morgan, now in in Beck's hands, never got more at his visits than a couple of glasses, just to keep him in tune; the big hut, as it was called, was consequently the only port for him.

There was, moreover, to be another participant in the good cheer of the day—one, however, of a very different stamp. Marianna had never been able to persuade Rachael to gratify her by getting into the little green cart and paying her a visit. Rachael's reluctance arose partly from the assigned reason, that she did not like to leave her father alone, and partly (which, though she did not even hint, her friend divined) that she did not feel quite certain of the propriety of paying the visit. Rachael's education had been not at all inferior to Miss Bracton's; and the property to which she would be sole heiress was at least equal to that which Lieutenant Bracton possessed for division amongst his whole family: but she was shrinkingly sensible of the contempt with which the world regards her race.

Beside this she had contracted a timidity and distaste for society which operated in the same direction. The scorn of the Gentile, on the one side, and the persecutions of the Jew on the other, had smitten upon her heart till her spirit was bowed down within her, and its attitude that of one who goes mourning from day to day. Well, indeed, she had loved her father; but could the vehement thoughts of girlhood be told to hoary age? Could the child appeal to the parent for the love that worships, and, evoking worship in return, consummates itself in a contention which shall be the least in the presence of the other? It could not be so; and Rachael had grown up without this trait thus given to character: only that her earnest soul, in its unquenchable aspiration for perfection, had still aimed at it through the ideal. She had loved the beautiful and holy images of her imagination, and, could they have lived, would have gone down upon her knees before them: but she knew not that there existed the impersonations of her ideal in the living humanity around her. None had ever lifted up the veil from their hearts and shown her that they too were just such as she was—that her very counterpart was passing her every hour, concealed only by the flimsy veil of circumstance and form. And hence the frank and strenuous truthfulness of Marianna made her seem like some long lost friend restored. Thus not till after some considerable period of intercourse with Marianna, and gradual acquaintance with the family at large, did Rachael begin to feel at all at ease away from her own home.

But the self-dependence which her isolation had compelled the young Jewess to learn was only defensive, not offensive: it was tempered with a meekness and a shrinking back upon herself that in a maiden of a race of less stamen would have presently become morbid.

Marianna, too, had become in some measure isolated by her enthusiastic temperament; whilst everything had tended to prompt her to assert herself, and to bear herself hopefully, joyfully, and fearlessly. The meeting together of these two natures was one of the appointed coincidences in the stupendous system of mental development. Neither character could have reached its decreed perfection without contact with the other. Minds thus brought into sympathy, to impart each to the other an opposite property, cling as inseparably together as if their law were the simple magnetic one. Marianna and Katharine had not clung together thus. Katharine's character had moved on from her very birth in due proportion of all its parts: her growth was the mere development of a perfect and unerring womanhood. She had no excess of the sad, like Rachael; no extreme of the buoyant, like Marianna; but stood perfect in what they were both aiming at—Marianna, from the one extreme, Rachael from the other—realizing their aspirations in her actual condition.

Thus the love of Marianna and Rachael for each other grew more profound from day to day. As each became better known to the other, each found in the other more of that she needed her-

self. Rachael often lovingly laughed at the unhesitating confidence of Marianna; Marianna as often lovingly lamented the timidity of Rachael. Of these troubles of Marianna's, the most vexatious of all was her friend's impracticability in the point of the visit; and it was especially so in the present instance. She had quite promised herself that she should succeed on Christmas-day. But no!

"Dear Miss Bracton," said Rachael, "how can I leave my father alone to go to the great feast of your people? My father is a Jew. I love your Prophet, and I sometimes thinks he loves him too; but he has never named his name aloud. I saw my dear father shut his eyes and compress his lips, like one who groans in spirit over an evil deed, when I exclaimed, 'Alas! that our unhappy nation should have crucified the Good One!' and he shook his head—but that is all."

This, in addition to her regret at Rachael's over-sensitive fear of intruding upon Mr. and Mrs. Bracton, and of compromising herself, Marianna had the further vexation of a long-cherished project proving unsuccessful. She, therefore, determined at once to avenge herself lovingly by sending over to Rachael a portion of the day's viands: having ascertained that nothing unusual would be provided for the day at the store, and having appealed to Katharine for "the nicest little plum-pudding that could be made—a little beauty," she arranged for John Thomas to mount and be at Ghiagong with it before it had time to cool.

How the dinner hour passed at the big hut may be easily imagined by the reader, from the details already given of the preparations. The scene before described of the rum-drinking at Morgan Brown's own hut will convey a sufficiently accurate notion of what followed the dinner when the customary "bottle of rum a man" for the harvest home, and another "half bottle a man" for the Christmas dinner, came down to the hut. In the parent country such an "allowance" appears culpable on the part of the master. Much of qualification, though no sufficient excuse of the evil practice, presents itself in the invariable custom and the climate of the locality. A much larger quantity of spirits may, undoubtedly, be used in a warm country than in a cold one without excess; as much larger doses of some drugs may, and indeed must, be taken to produce due effect. The bad custom, also, is a most tyrannical one; established in the earlier days of the Australian colonies, when no strong opinions in favour of teetotalism and temperance existed generally, it requires the most resolute principle now to denude it of authority; and the master who has not declared his determination to oppose the practice, is considered to have given a tacit consent to it. Such, at this time, Lieutenant Bracton found to be his position; and his niece, sharing in his regret, delivered the rum from the stores with a burdened conscience and a trembling hand.

Toast after toast went round, as time after time the panikin was replenished. There were none affecting the events of our tale for

some time; but at length one of the hands whom Martin Beck had hired in Sydney, and who, consequently, had been all along a sort of partisan of his, proposed "Good luck to the overseer." Martin Beck was generally liked. Though a laborious man himself, he was by no means a hard task-master to others, except when he had some peculiar motive; and, more than all, he never promoted discipline by an appeal to the Courts. If he had to drive a lazy man, it was always by some cutting sarcasm, or by drawing down upon him derision and other annoyances from his hut-mates; and so when he indulged a temporary spite against an individual. Until now, even his grudge against the Welshman had never sought any further gratification than that arising from perplexing him with difficult tasks, and irritating him by contemptuous treatment. Still, this was merely the consequence of having always had to associate with those amongst whom "Court-work" was in ill favour. Naturally, he had none of that generosity which refuses to be beholden for revenge to an advantage not possessed by his enemy.

Meantime, the Welshman had just previously been irritated, through being joked about Biddy by the mischievous fellow already described.

"Here's luck to John Thomas, our bullock-driver, and Mrs. Thomas, lady's maid to the cows," toasted the wag in a pause of the revelry, in a tone of such seemingly sincere urbanity that it was as impossible for the Welshman to resent it as it was for the rest of the hearers to refrain from a deafening peal of merriment. But under the excitement of the liquor, and chafed by the joke upon himself, the further submission of drinking the overseer's health was out of the question: he could not take fire at the jest without making things worse; but as to the overseer, by universal custom of the country he might say what he pleased: nay in speaking bluntly he knew he should be backed by several, and at least protected by the majority.

"I 'ood not drink her health if she was gasping, and it 'ood save her life," blurted out John Thomas. "I know her better as she know herself: she was not always come to your hut, countryman, for nothing," he added, addressing Morgan, who was from the extreme west of England, bordering on Wales.

There was so little in this ebullition different from what was often said about overseers, or other parties, by such as happened to bear them a grudge, that none except Morgan Brown took notice of it; but on him it told more weightily than even the Welshman himself was aware that it could; he looked all ways at once, and then fell entirely out of the conversation. Watching his opportunity, and staying only long enough to satisfy himself that nothing more was likely to be added, he quietly stole away to Martin's hut; where he found the black stretched on his berth, for once enjoying the holiday. On entering the black's hut a step or two, he stood still a moment, then going to the fire he took out his pipe, and deliberately filled it, without saying a word; stoop-

ing down and poking about the wood-ashes till he found a live coal that exactly suited him, he lit the pipe, and slowly raising himself, went on smoking.

"You seem in a study, old man," said Beck. Morgan Brown was a middle-aged man.

"So would you be, if you'd heard what I have."

"What's up?" eagerly asked the black, hastily raising himself upon his elbow; for he now understood the meaning of Brown's manner.

"*The Welshman wouldn't drink your health, if it would save your life. He knows you as well as you know yourself. You don't come to my hut for nothing.* Didn't I tell you so all along? I've known John Thomas longer than you have. This is what your giving him such lots of young bullocks to break in comes to: if you'd stuck to the old workers, he'd never have needed to go five miles from home for 'em, instead of prowling all about for a dozen miles beyond my hut."

"Did he say what you said, and no nonsense?" inquired the black.

"Why, of course he did, man; or else I shouldn't have come and told you."

"I'll stop his gallop," said the black, altogether losing his stammer in the force of repressed passion. "Just you run over to the gully there (the second in the range), t'other side the creek—in your mountain, I mean—and drive my horse up, while I get on my togs. Don't bring him here; run him a little way along the road to the township—I'll bring the saddle and bridle."

"Oh! you're going to do it murry-make-haste, then?" said Brown, brightening up. "What are you going at?"

"Never you mind—I'll have that fellow's ticket before he's a day older."

"Eh, eh?"

"He'll never come out of that township now he's got a drop in, without going down to the public-house; and as sure as he goes there he's nippered."

"But he's not there yet."

"Never mind, man; you get my horse up. He's going over there directly, with some cake, or pudding, or something for the Jew's daughter. My word! he'd better keep it for himself, for he'll be hungry before he comes back here again."

"Well?"

"There, fetch the horse, and be smart. If *I'm* to do it, leave me alone to do it: if *you* can do it, go and do it."

Morgan, yielding to the superior quickness and energy of the black, hastened off without further explanation. "It's a good job," said Beck, as he hastened to get out his best jacket and waistcoat, "that I *planted* my horse and told them I couldn't find him. Pshaw! and that fool would have stood parley-vouing here till the chance was lost." In about twenty minutes he was spurring at full speed for Ghiagong.

Checking his horse, to let him blow and get rid of the marks of hard galloping, as he neared the township, the black rode along within cover of the bush, so as not to be liable to be discerned from the store, to the corner nearest to the public-house: and there dismounting, unbuckled his horse's bridle, and passing it round a small tree, rebuckled it to the bit. Descending the bank of the river at a point where as yet it had not reached the open plain, he made his way along it on foot, till he brought the public-house (which was but a few paces from the bank) between him and the store, so as still to conceal himself from the sight of any one on Mr. Moses's premises. Rising on to the bank, he then proceeded into the public-house, hoping to find the man he was seeking; but he was not there.

"He's somewhere about the Court-House," said Peter Burnes, the landlord; "shall I send for him?"

"Do," said the black; "say *you* want him. I want to give him half-a-pint."

The individual sent for was a man known as Harry Grimsby, who had served a seven years' sentence, and was now some four years free. Too indolent to work, and too fond of a debauched life to occupy himself as a hut-keeper, or in any of the other easy employments of the bush, Grimsby, after getting over the principal part of his servitude as a farm constable—and some said a portion of it as a scourger at a distant police station—had, ever since he became free, held the situation of a constable at one or other of the townships. This office, in Australia, is at once the most despised and the most lucrative; the salary is ample because the odium is great, and other occupations are plentiful; then there are rewards for taking bushrangers, and the proceeds of informations constantly liable to be laid, besides numerous other large and ready gains; and, finally, there is the fullest opportunity of fleecing the intemperate working class, when intoxicated men in possession of considerable amounts of wages are met with.

Harry Grimsby was amongst the most active and unscrupulous of these extortioners. He was some forty-five years of age, but in appearance considerably older; of good height, bony and broad shouldered: but the most striking peculiarities of his physiognomy were the loss of an eye, and a sort of abstractedness, and ready-for-anything grin, that sat perpetually on his hard, colourless countenance.

The messenger found him, where Martin might have seen him if he had looked, standing with his back against the side wall of the Court-House, in the shade, his long staff pitched upon the toe of his uncleaned boot, and his hand resting on the top end of it. On receiving the message, he hurried across to the public-house, his faculties in that state of delirious vigour which the habitual sot attains at a certain point of his daily series of stimulants.

Taking him into an unoccupied room, the black proceeded to open his business. "I've got a troublesome customer on our

farm, Grimsby! You know him well: that Taffy that drives our bullocks. He thinks he's a match for any three men about!"

"I know him," said the constable. "He's double jointed, they say—as strong as a little horse. What weights I've seen him lift!"

"You're frightened of him?" rejoined the black; putting what he meant for a taunting assertion into the form of a query.

The constable made no verbal reply, but, grinning till all his teeth were visible, put his hand into the pocket of his fustian shooting-jacket, and bringing the but end of a horse-pistol into sight, exhibited it humorously, and then carefully put it out of sight again.

"Well! you know he's a ticket-of-leave man."

"I know," echoed the constable.

"It would just do him good to let him have six months in government. He'd be glad to be civil when he got his ticket again."

"And not a hard job neither, with our cove," said the constable. "He'll take a man's ticket for looking on the wrong side of the way;" and he chuckled maliciously.

"Will you have a glass?"

"I don't care if I do."

"Well, you can get it after I go: I'm in a hurry. I'll give you the brads. This Welshman, you know, I can't get along with him at all. He'll be in the township directly, and he's sure to come down here. Can't you give him a night over the way? He's half seas over now, and as good as the bank to come down here; and a ticket-of-leave man, you know, has no business to be drinking at a public-house."

"What are you going to stand?"

"Oh, giving you this trouble, you know, something tol-lol. Here, I'll tell you what I'll do; a caser (dollar) if you give him a night of it; and four if he gets what'll make him quiet."

"Bargain," said the constable.

"Don't be jerran (afraid), man. Only you chaff him, and you'll have his monkey up in a minute; and then if he hits out, you know it's assaulting the police."

"Oh, never you fear: I know all about that."

"Here's a caser; the rest is to come. You know I'm a man of my word."

"Never heard but what you was," said the constable.

The pair parted: Grimsby betaking himself to his look-out for the poor Welshman, and the black to make the best of his way back. As he cantered smartly up toward the hill point, where it drew near the creek, he saw Mr. Hurley riding steadily towards the house at a short distance before him, apparently dressed for dinner. He allowed Mr. Hurley to get out of sight; and then rode easily up to the door of his own hut, and deliberately took the saddle and bridle off his horse, without any affectation of concealment. He knew that by this time the Welshman must be nearly at the town-

ship; and, as he had taken care not to be seen starting himself, he could easily say he had found his own horse, and ridden out, after the Welshman had been despatched on the master's.

CHAPTER X.

The Constable's charge—The Welshman in a scrape—Biddy doing battle—Marianna's plea—Mr. Hurley and the ladies—The Welshman released.

DURING the succeeding night, Harry Grimsby awakened from the comatose sleep of the dram-drinker, to the delirious consciousness that follows it; the frenzied and tremulous excitement of caution was upon him—remorse he never felt. "Harry Grimsby—Harry Grimsby," he said, apostrophizing himself, "thou'st put thy foot into it. The man in the lock-up is a fancy man with that youngest lass at the Rocky Springs; and woe be to the man that gets in the way of John Hurley. Thou must put this to rights, lad, as soon as John is up." And with that he dozed off again.

At about half-past five in the morning after Christmas-day, Mr. Hurley was out walking to and fro in front of the Court-House. The night had been excessively sultry: on such nights the rest of many people is disturbed; and already several men were beginning to stir in and out of the few buildings.

Presently the debauched and repulsive face of Grimsby, who was sneaking round the corner of the Court-House to listen at Mr. Hurley's chamber window, and ascertain if he was at home, met him suddenly as he walked to that end of the front.

"Hallo, Grimsby! Where have you come from? Not abed last night?"

"Oh yes, sir, I have been to bed; only I thought as I'd come and see if you was up, to tell you, sir, as there's a man in the cells."

"Well, what then?"

"Why, sir; seein' as how it's a man belongin' to the Rocky Springs, I thought you'd like to know."

"Hem! very good of you, I'm sure. Pray what's the charge?"

"Why, sir, he was drunk, and—and—drunk, sir."

"'*Drunk*'—'*drunk, and*'—'*and*'—what, sir? I know you, sir, of old. There's some needle-pointing going on in this affair on your own side."

"Well, sir, he was assaulting the police; but I don't want to press that part of the charge. The lock-up keeper's got it agin' him; but knowin', sir, as how Captain Bracton's a friend of yours, I'm willin' to let that part drop."

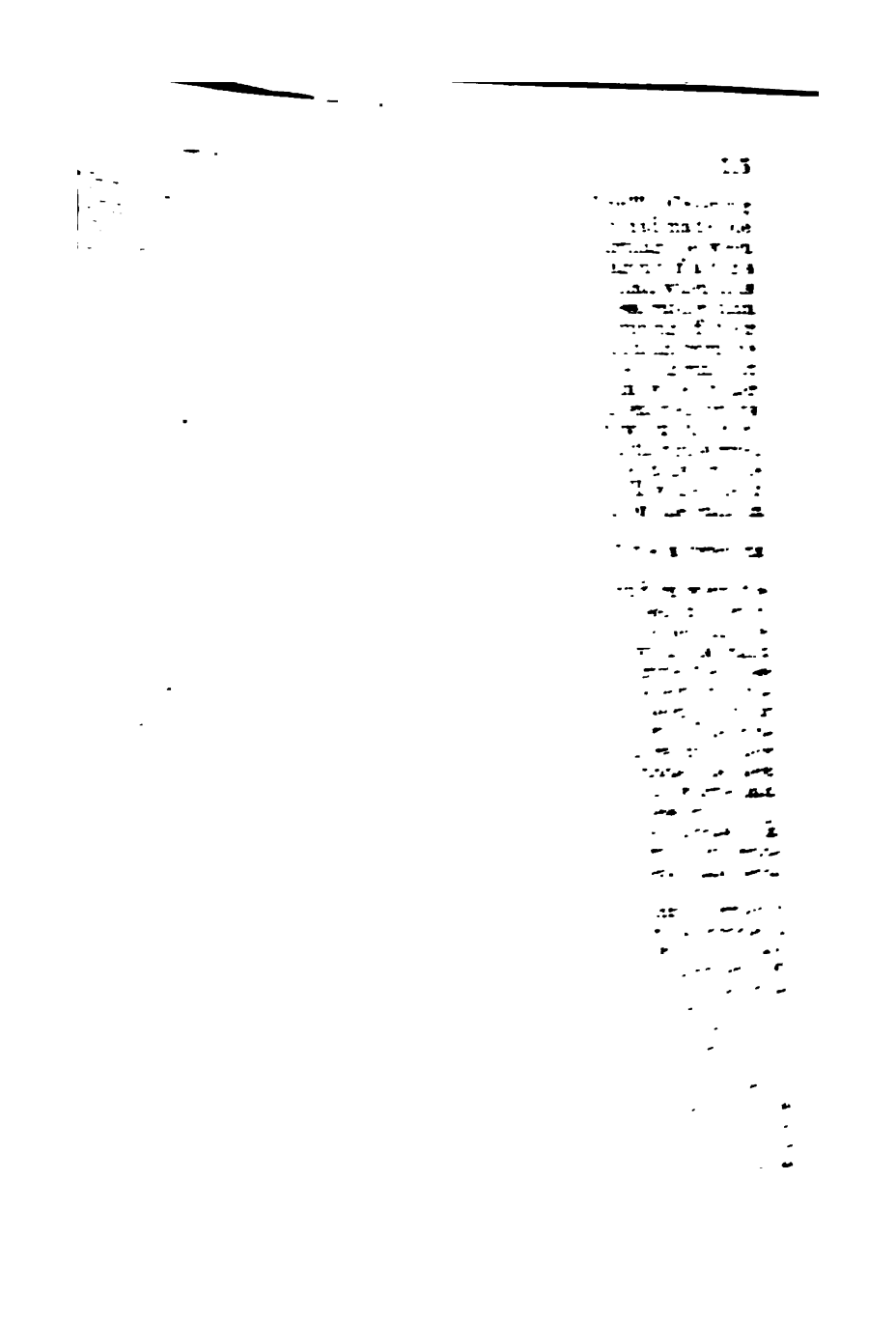
"Oh! then *you* were the police yourself? Was it I, or Mr. Bracton, that informed you that this compliment would be acceptable? What did the assault consist in? You police, you know, have very peculiar notions about assaults."

"Why, sir, he struck me."
"Where?"
"The chin, sir."
"I see no mark."
"No, sir; it was underneath."
"Well, but that would be your neck."
"He hit up'ards, sir."
"Oh! As how, pray?"
"So, sir," said the constable, doubling his fist, and strikin as John Thomas had done, but remarkably tenderly, against own chin."
"Well! that was a woful assault, certainly. Were you dri ing then?"
"I—I——"
"Hold up your chin. Why, there's no mark. Oh, yes, I s little discoloration. Or is it dirt? You can neither have was nor shaved yourself for this three days past. You certainly a dirty dog, Grimsby, both in person and character. Now, mind you don't look to it, that your dress and person are kept in s a state as your salary has been intentionally calculated to en you to do, I'll look to it that you receive that salary very li longer. You know how much I have put up with you alre from the mere circumstance of accidentally knowing some li about your child at home, whom you left, by your debaucher an outcast without a roof to protect her from the rain—*or ac* After what I have signified to you, I wonder your conscience allows you to sleep. How much have you now got chalked against you down at the public-house?"
"I don't know, sir."
"But at all events, I'll put a stop to it for you so far as I c Go over and tell Mr. Peter Burnes I want to speak to him for a minute."

Grimsby had not stated that it was the Welshman who was the lock-up; and it never occurred to Mr. Hurley to inqu whether the man was one of the important hands on a far When, therefore, he now went in, and wrote a note to Li tenant Bracton, to apprise him where he would find one of his m he did so under the impression of his being one of the ordin labourers; and without any expression of regret for the inc venience attending the loss of a bullock-driver at such a bu season, or any offer to expedite the trial of the offender by (if c sonant with the due administration of the law) his return to work.

On going out with the note, Grimsby and the publican w just approaching.

"Mr. Burnes," said Mr. Hurley, "I don't exactly choose to quire how much this man is in your debt. However, I'll tell you t —he was half drunk all day yesterday. I saw him going in to his 'morning,' as I came back from bathing before breakfast; saw him down at your house again three hours afterwards, w



"Why, sir, he struck me."
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"So, sir," said the constable, doubling his fist, and striking it as John Thomas had done, but remarkably tenderly, against his own chin."
"Well! that was a woful assault, certainly. Were you drinking then?"
"I—I——"
"Hold up your chin. Why, there's no mark. Oh, yes, I see a little discoloration. Or is it dirt? You can neither have washed nor shaved yourself for this three days past. You certainly are a dirty dog, Grimsby, both in person and character. Now, mind, if you don't look to it, that your dress and person are kept in such a state as your salary has been intentionally calculated to enable you to do, I'll look to it that you receive that salary very little longer. You know how much I have put up with you already, from the mere circumstance of accidentally knowing some little about your child at home, whom you left, by your debaucheries, an outcast without a roof to protect her from the rain—*or worse.* After what I have signified to you, I wonder your conscience ever allows you to sleep. How much have you now got chalked up against you down at the public-house?"
"I don't know, sir."
"But at all events, I'll put a stop to it for you so far as I can. Go over and tell Mr. Peter Burnes I want to speak to him for half a minute."
Grimsby had not stated that it was the Welshman who was in the lock-up; and it never occurred to Mr. Hurley to inquire whether the man was one of the important hands on a farm. When, therefore, he now went in, and wrote a note to Lieutenant Bracton, to apprise him where he would find one of his men, he did so under the impression of his being one of the ordinary labourers; and without any expression of regret for the inconvenience attending the loss of a bullock-driver at such a busy season, or any offer to expedite the trial of the offender by (if consonant with the due administration of the law) his return to his work.
On going out with the note, Grimsby and the publican were just approaching.
"Mr. Burnes," said Mr. Hurley, "I don't exactly choose to inquire how much this man is in your debt. However, I'll tell you this—he was half drunk all day yesterday. I saw him going in to get his 'morning,' as I came back from bathing before breakfast; I saw him down at your house again three hours afterwards, when

I was up on the hill, on the other side of the river, with my glass; I saw him going over to your house when I was riding out of the township in the afternoon; and I met him so drunk, that he did not even know me, and almost tumbled under my horse's feet, when I came back late at night. Now, observe what I tell you: there is nowhere but at your house that he can get liquor to keep it up in this way. He can't *buy* single drams at the store, and I'll take care that Miss Moses *gives* him no more. His conduct is such, that I can break him any day I choose; and *if* I have to break him, through your trusting him, I'll make you suffer for it: I'll break him on the day he receives his salary, and then he'll run away with it, and never pay you a farthing; and I'll certify that your house is a pest to the township, and yourself utterly unfit to have a licence. I have no doubt your principal reason for trusting him is, that you are afraid of his looking too sharp after you and the company in your house. But if he is only to take into custody such disorderly persons as *you* think fit, he is *your* constable, instead of an officer of this court. Grimsby, take this note over to the settlers at the Rocky Springs."

"Humph!" said Mr. Peter Burnes, and the constable to each other, eyeing the address, after the young gentleman had gone in. "This Miss Bracton (for so the note happened to be addressed), then, is the settler at the Rocky Springs."

About three hours after this time, just as the family at Diandullah Mountain were about to disperse from the breakfast-table, "One-eyed Grimsby," as he was usually denominated in the township and its neighbourhood, presented himself at the door of Martin Beck's hut, covered with perspiration, and bearing all the other marks of a sharp journey on foot through the bush. Martin was already aware of what had taken place; Morgan Brown having ridden across to Ghiagong, in the evening of the preceding day, to ascertain.

"Well, Grimsby," said the overseer, "*what's o'clock?*"

"He's nippered, safe enough," replied Grimsby; "but it's like to be an awkward job. I can see the young fellow's precious savage about it."

"What did he say?"

"Oh, not a word," replied Grimsby. "He's too good a judge to *say* anything. But I shall have to look out for myself for this three months to come, before I shall get it out of his head. Wish you'd take this letter up to your cove."

"From Mr. Hurley?"

"Yes."

"To Captain Bracton?"

"Yes."

"Well, take it to Captain Bracton, then; don't bring it to me. Have you had your breakfast? But, stop, you'll like a whet first, after yesterday."

So saying, Martin, who was just going out as Grimsby arrived, turned round, and unlocking his chest, drew out a square half-

gallon bottle, and filled out nearly half a panikin of rum, for the poor, trembling victim of his own intemperance and Beck's cunning.

"There, drink that, man, and then make yourself some breakfast. I can't stop. Hoy, Dunny Jack," he shouted, addressing John Thomas's mate, who was standing at the big hut-door, wondering when, or whether at all, his principal would come to light, —fetch up all the bullocks you can find nigh hand: here's a constable from the township to say your mate's got into a scrape. I must have in just one load of flooring boards for the new cottage; and then you can do what you like for the day."

"But how 'll you do without the bullock-driver?" inquired Grimsby.

"Oh, man," replied the black, "I've spare-chained a seventy-foot girder out of a brush, with a team of twelve bullocks before now: it's odd if I can't manage half-a-dozen in the open forest."

Martin went out, leaving the constable to help himself; but Grimsby was too much terrified by his position, and the reprimand he had already received, to do so. Hastily making a couple of gulps of the liquor, he put an his hat again, and moved towards the house. At the men's hut-door, as he reached it, stood Biddy, who had heard the overseer's piece of information to Dunny Jack, and had stolen down to learn all she could about it.

"An' fhat have you got Shaun in the lock-up for?" asked Biddy. "The divil may take you to himself, that you couldn't let the poor boy come to the township—and the mistress sending him, too—but ye's must take his ticket from him. Arrah, bad luck to ye's, ye dirt!"

"Here," said Grimsby, as rudely as he dared, after surveying the mass of scowling faces that had fixed their eyes on him, over one another's shoulders from inside the hut, "take this letter up to the master. It's from Mr. Hurley."

"Troth, and ye'll take it yerself," replied Biddy.

"Here, some of you lads take it," repeated Grimsby, appealing in an authoritative, but more civil tone, to the men; for he saw enough to make him in haste to be gone: he needed no telling that if he could be only got inside the hut, out of the master's sight and hearing, he would come out sorely contused.

"Don't none of ye's take it for him, boys," cried Biddy. "Let the spalpeen go wid it himself. Anamondyoul!"—addressing Grimsby —"ye's didn't come here for anybody to help you to put Shaun in the lock-up."

But this was all the battle Biddy could do: the next minute she was to be found sobbing and wringing her hands behind the dairy door.

Grimsby, meantime, baffled in all his attempts to avoid going up to the hut where the family resided, and where they were now just about to rise from breakfast, resolutely faced the difficulty, and presented himself at the door.

"A letter, your honour," he said, lifting his hat, as he encountered the firm, but by no means aggressive eye of the master. The portly, well-aged gentleman sat between the hearth and the table, with the hand of his daughter on his shoulder. Katharine, who sat on the other side, rose and received the missive from Grimsby at the door, and seeing the direction of the letter, handed it to her cousin: she then walked round, and, leaning her hands on the shoulders, and her chin upon the head of Marianna, proceeded to gratify her curiosity as to the contents.

In an instant, Katharine drew herself suddenly up, with an expression of dismay and pain on her countenance; while, at the same time, her cousin's face assumed a look of the utmost consternation and vexation. Without glancing her eye beyond the first sentence, Marianna recommenced and began to read aloud; "Ghiagong, Thursday morning. My dear Miss Bracton,—One of your papa's men is in the cells. As it is holiday time, he will probably be safer there than outside, till the court sits on Saturday—(How very unfeeling of Mr. Hurley!)—And now my very, very dear—dear—my"—and a long pause followed.

"Well, what else?" asked Lieutenant Bracton; not comprehending the "pet's" confusion. "Who does Mr. Hurley say it is?"

"Oh! the rest," replied Katharine, "is only their little small-talk between themselves, papa."

"Doesn't Mr. Hurley say who it is?"

"No; not a syllable. Turn over, sister; perhaps he mentions m a postscript. No, sir; not a syllable: but I fear it must be John Thomas."

"Can it be John Thomas?" asked Mrs. Bracton. "Call, Biddy, my dear, and let her go to the men's hut and inquire."

Katharine hastened to do so, but had scarcely passed the threshold when Biddy presented herself, holding another note in one hand, and the corner of her apron, with which she had been endeavouring to get her face to rights in the other.

"Biddy!" exclaimed Katharine.

"Oh, Miss! they've got Shaun in the lock-up; and they say Mishther Hurley never forgives anybody for bating the police. Bad luck to the old one-eyed divil! he never had a heart in the middle of his four bones like Shaun's."

"What! the constable that brought the letter just now?"

"Fait, Miss, an' that's himself. Mishther Moses's man says it was him put him in for bating him."

"This note, then, was brought by Mr. Moses's man?"

Katharine now returned with the second note to Marianna. It was from Rachael; and its contents were simply these:—

"DEAREST,—You will have heard, before this reaches you, that our poor messenger is in trouble. What a pity I should have been the cause of the mischief! He hung the bridle of his horse on the hook at our door, when he went down to the

public house: I'm sure he didn't mean to stop ten minutes. So, when we saw him going across to the lock-up, my father made the man bring in the saddle and bridle, and hobble the horse and turn him over the river, where there is some good grass. Cannot something be done for him? I hear Mr. Hurley is very severe about assaults on the police; which is the charge. I mean, cannot something be done to get him released before court-day, which is not till Saturday? I have sent him some supper, and will send him something from our own table every meal time. Come over. In haste, your own RACHAEL."

"Papa, he shall not be flogged!" exclaimed Marianna, turning to her father, with an energy which would have startled a stranger, and then falling on his neck in a passion of tears."

"My dear," urged her father, "I am not 'in command' in the business; but I believe, as he is a ticket-of-leave man, the utmost will be the loss of that, and his return to government."

"Well, that's almost as bad," sobbed Marianna. "Do, do, papa, try and stay them from taking his ticket: he's to be married to Biddy, you know, by-and-bye."

"But, my dear Nanny, I tell you I have no authority myself in the case; and I think Mr. Hurley would very justly consider my interference with his decisions highly improper."

"I will never believe," exclaimed Marianna, "that he has been guilty of anything seriously criminal."

"Mr. Moses's man," interposed Katharine, "told Biddy that it was an assault on that old constable who brought Mr. Hurley's note; and he didn't seem much hurt."

"Well, papa," pleaded Marianna, "then you'll drive me over to the store, wont you? You have never seen Miss Moses yet, and I want you to see her. I know you'll be in love with her; she is such a sweet girl!"

"Oh, no, no! that would never do; if only on your mamma's account: besides, I should break the little cart down. But I suppose you and Katharine had better take one of the men, and go over and see what it exactly is. The offence cannot be anything very serious, or Mr. Hurley would have specified it himself: besides, I should wish Mr. Moses to be told that whatever he thinks the man needs, he can send over to the gaol for him, till the trial. It certainly would be very vexatious to lose that man! I think I will ride over myself."

"Well, we shall go, too, sister. Papa, when you order your horse, will you tell them to get the cart ready? But *you can't* go—it's your horse that's over at the township."

In rather more than another hour afterwards, the two young ladies entered the little parlour of the store at Ghiagong, along with their friend Rachael, who had lent her hand to help them to jump down from the cart.

"What is to be done?" exclaimed Marianna.

She and Rachael clasped each other's hands, and looked in each other's faces; with singularly different expression, however: that on Marianna's face was pure anxiety,—that on Rachael's largely partaking of contentment.

"Oh!" said Rachael, "it will be all very well now. I am so glad you are come! If he had lost his ticket, I should never have forgotten it."

"But how, Rachael?—how do you mean? What can I do?"

"You must ask Mr. Hurley, dear, and he'll let him off."

"Oh, dear! no, Rachael; I could not do that."

"She could not do that, Miss Moses," echoed Katharine.

"Why not?" was the innocent inquiry of Rachael. "Oh! you think it improper. Well, how foolish!"

"Indeed, it would be improper," persisted Katharine.

"That is very strange," murmured Rachael, perplexed.

"But even if I should," pleaded Marianna—"but no, Rachael, I will not."

"Mr. Bracton says," added Katharine, "that he could not himself; plainly, then, my sister could not."

"Why?" urged Rachael—"why could not your father ask Mr. Hurley to look over it?"

"Because papa feels that making such a request would be almost the same thing as attempting to influence Mr. Hurley in the exercise of his office: besides, Mr. Hurley may really consider the offence one that ought not to be looked over."

"Neither, Katharine, neither. It will be all well, if Marianna will only make the request. See! here is Mr. Hurley coming over," she exclaimed, pointing through the window. "I'll ask him myself, now you are here to say Mr. Bracton wishes it. Nothing is more common, you know, than for settlers to request a magistrate to forgive a man, who is a good man generally, a single fault; and this, everybody says, is hardly a fault at all. I shall ask in your papa's name."

Mr. Hurley's voice was now heard without, calling, "Miss Rachael, Miss Rachael!"

"Open the door and come in, sir," answered Rachael; with a little finesse, thinking to throw Mr. Hurley off his guard, by surprise at seeing her visitors unexpectedly, and so prefer her request.

"I have a favour to beg, Miss Rachael," commenced Mr. Hurley, as he opened the door, well knowing by the cart outside who was within. "Marianna! Katharine! shopping?—or something about this man?"

"Yes, Mr. Hurley," said Rachael, "and a favour, too, for him, if you want one from me."

"Pray what is it, ladies? I can tell you this, that his assault on the police is only a piece of humbug."

"I knew it," exclaimed Marianna: "I told papa, did I not, Katharine, that he would never be guilty of any real crime? and I was sure that Mr. Hurley would know so, too."

"You do me too much honour on that point, Miss Bracton," said

Mr. Hurley, rather seriously; "I have not yet examined him; all I know is from the paltry story of his accuser. But what is this favour, Miss Moses, and what is the condition of your acceding to the request I have to make? Or perhaps I had better make the first statement. You often give the constable Grimsby a glass of rum; I know it is out of kindness to a man whom no one associates with—but, I assure you, it has the reverse of a benevolent effect:—he then wants more, and goes down to Burnes', and gets rid of the friend he might keep in his pocket. Don't give him any more, there's a good young lady. Will you oblige me?"

"Most willingly, Mr. Hurley; and now more so than ever: for I am afraid it is only too likely that my giving him a double glass, as it was Christmas-day, and he rode over so hard to bring me dear Miss Bracton's seasonable present, was the means of getting the man into a scrape."

"Why, who is it, Marianna?" asked Mr. Hurley; "surely not your bullock-driver?"

"Yes," replied all the young ladies at once. "Did you not know it?"

"No; but I thought that scoundrel Grimsby must have some more than ordinary motive. He came to me at six o'clock this morning, and offered not to press the charge of assault, because your papa was a friend of mine. Ha! ha! a clean bowl out! I see it all: he thought he'd gone too far—and no marks to show. Well, as for the assault; but I must enforce respect for the police, in the midst of such a population, or we should presently want three times as many constables to keep the peace. Your papa wants him on the farm, Miss Bracton?"

"Yes."

"The man who looks after the Court-House is away, and he has the keys; otherwise I would have him up at once. I can see you would like to know the worst before you go."

"Yes; if you would be so kind."

"Then, again, Grimsby has not got back."

"There is the corporal of the mounted police, Mr. Hurley, standing on the green," observed Rachael; "he can tell you all about it. Shall I call him to the door?"

"I'll call him myself, Miss Moses," replied Mr. Hurley; and leaving the young ladies in the parlour, he went to the door for that purpose.

The corporal repeated what he had already said to Rachael: adding that the Welshman was not even to be called really intoxicated.

"Well," said Mr. Hurley, "Grimsby says he makes no charge of assault, and you say there was no ground for the charge of intoxication; and I know personally that Grimsby was intoxicated himself. It would be very unjust to confine the man till court-day, under such circumstances. Go and fetch him over.

Mr. Hurley stood at the store door till the culprit arrived. He came, all the paler for his night's confinement, and looking in

every direction save at the magistrate; but evidently as unsubdued as if nothing had happened.

"Repeat what you have to say in the man's presence," said the magistrate, addressing the corporal.

"Well, sir, this man was certainly a little the worse for liquor. I was in at Peter Burnes', it being Christmas-day, having half a pint of rum after dinner, when Grimsby the constable went and sat down by this man, and tried to force his conversation upon him: but the man didn't seem to want to have anything to say to him. At last Grimsby took the jug of water, and, instead of pouring it into his own glass, nearly filled this man's up; pretending it was a mistake."

"Well, how about the assault?"

"I think the prisoner asked him if he did that on purpose, for I could not quite hear; and I heard Grimsby say, 'As you like it.' Then the prisoner gave him a chuck with his fist under the chin."

"Was that all?"

"Yes, your worship; but when Grimsby got up, and pulled out his pistol, and collared him, and the man tried to take the pistol away from him——"

"No," interrupted the Welshman, "I never want the pistol at all; but she was very near blow my brains out, she was so drunk. She hold the pistol in my face, and her finger was hold the trigger."

"At last," continued the corporal, "when the man began to get the best of him, he called on me, in the Queen's name, to help him; and I didn't dare to refuse. So then the man gave in, and we took him over to the lock-up."

"You hear, Thomas," said Mr. Hurley, "what the corporal says: he partly exculpates and partly inculpates you. But as the charge of assault resolves itself into one of a very different character from those which I have determined to deal severely with, I may look over *for once*, as it was Christmas-day, your offence as a ticket-of-leave man in being in liquor. You may go, corporal—he is discharged. And now let me caution you not to forget how easily you can get rid of your ticket of exemption from government service. Ay, that's Miss Bracton. She has had the trouble of coming all the way over to Ghiagong this morning to look after you. You owe your release, I can tell you, to her. Take care you requite her by your future good conduct."

"Yes," said the Welshman, very seriously; "I am always very fond to Miss Mary."

Mr. Hurley walked away to the corner of the store, partly to conceal a smile from the culprit, and partly to allow him an opportunity of paying his fee of thanks to the gentle solicitors who had been practising in his behalf.

That night the Welshman was welcomed safe back amongst his messmates, little dreaming, however, how his scrape was brought about, and to whom he owed it; whilst Martin Beck sat in his hut alone, grinding his teeth with vexation.

CHAPTER XI.

Harvest at Broken Bay—Willoughby's "clearers"—Naming the sloop—"The Daisy of the Bay"—Mary Kable and her new friends.

OUR narrative now transfers itself to Brisbane Water, as nothing of an overt kind affecting the welfare of the new settlers took place at the Rocky Springs for some months. Martin Beck and Morgan Brown were indeed covertly watching the Welshman's movements, and planning various schemes for getting rid of him from that part of the country; but, in the meantime, whilst they supposed themselves in imminent danger from his seeing on Coolarama-creek run the young cattle they had branded for themselves out of Lieutenant Bracton's herd, he still continued to suppose them only beasts branded in the names of Mrs. Bracton and her daughter. In ceaseless terror of the Welshman, their malice toward him became bitter, concentrated, and unscrupulous: Morgan, on every fresh occasion when he met with him became more and more ruffianly and abusive; while Martin's malignity took the form of vigilance and silent determination. Something to John Thomas's surprise and perplexity, the overseer left off "drilling" him on the farm;—left him almost to himself; and even appeared on occasions almost friendly.

Meantime, Broken Bay also had had its season of gathering in the harvest. The fine lake-like arm of Brisbane Water displayed all round upon its sweep of shores an abundant crop: the maize waved to and fro in the sea breeze, its elegant tassels depending from stalks of ten feet high, forming arched avenues betwixt the rows, down which the farm residents might stray in the heat of noon quite shielded from the sun. The wheat also turned out its crop of sixty-three and sixty-five pounds to the bushel. Cheered by the bountiful produce of the season, the young Australian might be seen leading his reapers, with the heaviest sickle and the longest strides, often till the moon was radiant in the still sky of midnight. The old settlers never employ so many hands as new; and, unless in the case of such as make a point of maintaining a show of superior rank, the members of their own families are often the quickest and most untiring reapers in the field.

More than once before the wheat was off the ground, and often whilst the maize was plucking, Willoughby, as he was steering over to his anchorage after tacking, could perceive, first the fluttering ribbons of another bonnet beside the old bushman's daughter's, and then detect the steadfast gaze of its wearer across the water, and watch her departure in sudden haste toward the cottage. On the native's farm, too, the harvest-home and the Christmas-day had both been differently celebrated from what they had been at the Rocky Springs.

The owner was accustomed to his position, and settled into

habits no longer under the tyranny of those he employed; his men were paid their money whenever they chose to ask for it, and it was then their own; they might do as they liked with it. But if they chose to spend it in drinking, it must be—*not on the farm*. The proprietor of the Rocky Springs, like all new settlers, had yet to establish his right thus to dictate, by a first year's experience of the exigency, and by a formally expressed decision. Reuben Kable's resolution on the point was so well known, that no one thought of objecting to his carrying it out.

Willoughby's own section, likewise, which he had now obtained possession of, was exhibiting numerous tokens of the energetic superintendency of his friend. A little, wiry cockney, thief-bred, who had weathered all the severities of road-parties and iron-gangs, with a mate exactly correspondent to himself, from the Irish metropolis,—a first-rate combination for a falling-party,—having heard of the job somewhere in their wanderings, came across and took ten acres by the piece. They levelled it in a fortnight; and then, fancying the work and the master, and also the young mistress, they agreed for the burning-off.

When Willoughby came up by night, the fires on his own land were no bad beacon in making his anchorage: he could see them several miles before he made his berth, smouldering along the bank; first dimly and smokily, then—as the burners-off woke up and came out of their tent-hut to put the logs together afresh after their surfaces had burnt back from each other—emitting with the jerk a shower of sparks up into the darkness; and when by contact they began to burn actively again, sending up a steady ruddy blaze, chorusing altogether into a deep roar which might be heard far upon the water. If the wind and tide were such that he happened to be expected, Larry and Ned were always on the look-out; and, if they could descry the shape of the well-known white sail slowly stealing along the dark face of the bay, were sure to be lying smoking on the bank, to board "our young cove, the skipper," for a glass of the real stuff: for such, and nothing but such, Willoughby had the reputation of giving ship-room to. It was, however, difficult often to tell by the light of the fires, which of the smut-masked faces was the Irish, and which the Englishman's.

On the other hand, Willoughby proved as welcome a coadjutor to Reuben Kable, in the nautical and commercial undertaking, as Reuben was an efficient superintendent of the first farm operations for him. The sailors soon discovered, by the bold runs made, that if they had not a more fearless skipper than Reuben was when he chose to sail the boat, they had a much more skilful one. Paid still by the trip, and now making on an average four trips where they were used formerly to make three, they were well satisfied with the change; and the trading, more steadily carried on by one who possessed a main interest in it, proved not at all less lucrative than Reuben Kable had predicted.

Indeed, all went prosperously. Only light mistakes were made

sometimes in a matter of another sort; Willoughby forgetting himself and addressing the young lady as "Polly," and Mary Kable omitting to make any formal distinction in addressing her brother and his friend, and calling the latter Willoughby.

At length, Willoughby, having become sufficiently acquainted with the channels of the various inlets and streams of Broken Bay to pronounce on the build of boat he would prefer for his future trading, it was resolved to purchase such an one, immediately an opportunity occurred. This took place toward the latter end of February, succeeding the Christmas the events of which at the Rocky Springs have been already described. Along with his own opinion, Willoughby, having fixed his eye upon a small neat sloop, not above a couple of years off the stocks, and built upon one of the branches of the Hawkesbury, wished to have the benefit of his father's more experienced judgment. To the appeal for his advice Lieutenant Bracton joyfully acceded, not a little gratified at the successful experiment of his son; and, on reflection, far from insensible of the charms which such a life must have to him in the prime of his age, and habituated to salt water from his infancy.

The new boat, meantime, though built in a stream debouching into Broken Bay, had been hitherto a Five Islander, running down the coast on the other side of Port Jackson; and had consequently borne a name connected with the southern trade. She was to be fresh painted; and if purchased, it was determined to give her a fresh name: a matter, as all sea-going people know, of not less importance than the change of name to the fair sex. This became a subject of no little debate, whenever, during the month of February, the little party at Brisbane Water met for an evening all together: but chiefly it was matter of debate betwixt Willoughby Bracton and Mary Kable; he insisting that the little sloop should be called after his friend's sister, and she contending that it should be called after his own.

"You can't think how much better I shall sail her, Polly," said Willoughby, after a very cogent argument to the contrary, "as the *Mary Kable*, of Brisbane Water."

"Stuff, Willoughby!" exclaimed the young lady, trying hard to repress one of the most exquisite attempts ever made by a mouth to smile. "Reuben, I wish you'd determine it. What do you say?"

"Nothing; he may call her what he likes. *The Ugly Always, or Mary Kable of Brisbane Water;* that's what I shall vote for."

"Very well, brother; I'm content. And I dare say Willoughby is; so we're all agreed. There's no need of saying any more about it."

"I should have all the hands fighting who'd be over the stern first with a scraper," said Willoughby, laughing. "And I doubt the painter would have to make night-work to get it there at all."

"Yes; I know Jack wouldn't let it be there for one; would he, Willoughby?" was Mary's appeal.

"I shouldn't like," replied he, "to tell Jack it was there by my orders."

At length Willoughby, on getting back from Sydney, informed his friends that his father would be there to meet him on his return; and that, as it was now some months since his mother and sisters had seen him, and they, moreover, wanted several things from Sydney, which only themselves could select, the ladies also meant to accompany his father.

"And now, Daisy of Broken Bay!—there, there—my head gets raps enough with the blocks."

"Don't you know, Willoughby, its very rude to call people nick-names?"

"Well; this is not what I want to talk about at all," said Willoughby: "of course you *must* go and see my sisters, Mary; so we shall bring you back again in the sloop. And, as we are at a loss for a name, what so proper as to give her that of the first lady she carries?"

"Agreed," replied Mary: "but if I should persuade one of your sisters, or both of them, to come back and stay a month with me, how then?"

"I rather think they wont get leave," replied Willoughby; "but if such a thing should happen, we must lump you all into one collective title. Say the *Three Nereides*."

"Nereides! I have seen the word, I know, in the heathen mythology: but I never could read that mythology; I quite hated it; it seems like a history of mad people."

"Well, darling," said Reuben, "we must take you with us this time, at all rates: we can talk about the name of the boat afterwards. I wish you to be acquainted with the Miss Bractons; so get ready all you want in the course of to-morrow. There's almost sure to be a wind at the change of the moon. Don't you think there will?"

"Yes; to-morrow night about this time, you ought to be ready to come aboard."

Accordingly at the specified hour on the following evening, her heavy luggage already aboard in the captain's care, Mary Kable, furred to the chin and shawled to the ankles, her little basket in her hand, tripped lightly down the dewy path, through the darkness, to the wharf; and then, with a brother holding her hand before, and a brother's friend taking care of her behind, she stepped along the narrow plank laid from the bank to the deck. The anchor was heaved; and in a few minutes, the old *Sarah* stood out into the bay, for the last time, from Reuben Kable's wharf.

The party had a quick and pleasant voyage. Soon after daylight they ran up Sydney harbour, in company with the *Little Bee*; and, the wind chopping round, made a long leg over to the north shore of Cockle Bay; then tacked and shot across to the Market Wharf, where they dropped anchor. Reuben Kable soon

afterwards accompanied his friend and his sister to Lieutenant Bracton's hotel. He and the young ladies were out for a morning walk, but Mrs. Bracton, who was awaiting their return to breakfast, received Mary with such marked regard, as to leave Reuben no doubt that in some way she had surmised the future relationship to her family of the unaffected and beautiful stranger. With this satisfaction, after arranging for her stay at the hotel, her brother made no hesitation in proceeding about urgent business of his own on the Nepean River: whither he was obliged to make his way by an early coach, having no horse in Sydney.

Reuben had thus no opportunity of joining his friend Lieutenant Bracton in the survey of the new sloop: but this was of little consequence, as he had known her from the time when her keel was first laid down, on the banks of that branch of the Hawkesbury in which she was built. Lieutenant Bracton decidedly approved of Willoughby's choice. "A good sea-boat," said the old gentleman emphatically, directly he had run his eye over her; "and well-built for stowing away cargo."

Again, carrying his own crew with him, Willoughby steered down the harbour, accompanied by the old consort of his craft, the *Little Bee*, and a whole host of the Musquito fleet. They had fair weather into Broken Bay heads; where, as he had to run this trip up the Hawkesbury, Reuben and Mary had to be transhipped to the *Bee*.

When the Australian maid turned to make her unobserved adieu to the young skipper, from the deck of the *Bee*, as the new sloop shot off up the main channel, to her surprise and delight she read, in letters of gold, her own name upon the stern. All eyes on both decks were fixed upon her: no one moved, and for a little while no one spoke; then, from the deck of the sloop, there rose, above the bluster of the wind and the roar of Barrenjueh, the sailors' loud huzzas, and her own name mingled with the cheers, as the whole crew waved their caps—even to the little sea-boy, Jack, mounted on the bulwark, and holding on by the rigging; whilst the young skipper, uncovered, stood leaning over the stern. The hands on the schooner returned the shout by a cheer for "The Daisy of the Bay;" and whether to blush, or cry, or laugh, Mary knew not, till Reuben put his arms round her, and taking her hands in his, turned her face to the fresh breeze, and so supported her till they had run round the bluff rock on the starboard beam, into smooth water.

Half an hour's quiet thought, and a few sighs to relieve her surcharged heart, and the healthful maiden was herself again. And when, as the little vessel beat tediously onward towards home, Reuben sat down beside her, and inquired how she had enjoyed herself with the Miss Bractons, she had a tale to tell of deeper interest than any that had fallen to her lot for a long, long time. Unused to the polished grace of an English lady's manner—and, possibly, a little roguishly practised upon by Marianna—she could not find words fully to express her delight in her new friends.

"Oh! brother," she said, "I wish you had seen Katharine; you never saw anything so lovely. Willoughby's sister is very beautiful; but she is such a clever girl that one is almost afraid of her. But Katharine! Oh! she has such eyes, Reuben! And she is so calm and self-possessed, and yet so friendly! And her voice—you can't get it out of your ear! I hear it still, as if she were here and now speaking. And, then, the way she talks; as if she were one's mother! And she dresses so nicely; and there is such gracefulness in everything she does. And such beautiful hands!—and her skin! Really, Reuben, on her temples, when the hair is thrown back, it seems as if you could actually see the blood bounding along within her violet veins!"

"There—there—there! That'll do for this time. I can't stop to hear any more. Get all your little traps together; it'll be down-anchor directly. Well, we've made a very quick run. So, you see, Willoughby's done us: it's the *Mary Kable, of Brisbane Water*, after all."

From this time forward, the "*Mary Kable*" maintained an active and lucrative trade on the various waters of Broken Bay. The scarcity of a circulating medium in the Australian colonies has led to the establishment of a system of barter; and this of all modes of commercial traffic is the most lucrative to the dealer, who not only obtains his profit on the goods he gives, but he invariably resells at a second profit those he receives in exchange. But where the master of one of these trading crafts has it in his power to pay in cash for grain, or tobacco in the leaf, sawn timber, or other produce of the farms on the banks, a still further gain accrues to him, through a lower price being taken by the producers for commodities sold for money, than would be taken if they were merely bartered; whilst yet again the dealer who pays ready money to the Sydney merchants for the goods he buys of them, invariably obtains a considerable discount.

It may easily be supposed that the friendship of the young men increased, as each discovered the trustworthiness and capacity of the other. Reuben also could not be blind to his friend's growing attachment to his sister; while Mary, on her part, if she bashfully shunned reasoning upon the point, nevertheless instinctively felt that her partiality for her brother's friend was justified, both by his inherent qualities and by her brother's previous recognition of them. Never before had she seen the thoughtful, and, at times, seemingly almost haughty, Reuben, make a familiar acquaintance with others. Probably he had not done so now, but that the consciousness of having rendered Willoughby and his family an important service, dispersed the habitual reserve which belonged to his character, and led him at once into a degree of familiar intercourse, which proved the more agreeable to him from its novelty.

Henceforth many an evening did Mary while away by her reminiscences of her trip to Sydney; but on whatsoever point of the subject she began, she invariably ended with a eulogy of "dear

Katharine." One while it was her beauty; another time it was her goodness; then it was, "Oh, brother, I never told you about the little boy that's so fond of her. His mother and father, you know, have just come out from England, and are staying at the same hotel. And the little fellow, though he is only about two years and a half old, comes a dozen times a day, and beats at the door, and when they open it, and say, 'Well, sir, whom do you want?' He says, 'Kath., Kath.:' so Katharine takes him on her lap, and spreads a whole tableful of drawings before him; and when he is tired of looking at them he throws himself back in her arms, with a sigh, and goes to sleep. Then Katharine takes him to his mamma's room, and lays him on the bed: but by-and-bye he's back at the door again, to get to 'Kath.'"

"There, there. Pray don't tell me any more."

"Ah! it's very unkind of you, Reuben, not to listen. You always want to stop me when I begin to talk about dear Katharine. If you had seen her yourself, you wouldn't do so."

CHAPTER XII.

The cattle-stealers in danger of detection—The bullock-driver shepherding—Aversion of cattle to sheep—Branding cattle—A trap for the Welshman.

THE transactions at the Rocky Springs now throw themselves into a twelvemonth's tale. Before leaving Sydney, Lieutenant Bracton, as a naval officer, and known to be a settler of substance, received for himself and his family an invitation to one of the public parties at Government House; and becoming thus personally known to his Excellency the Governor, was a few days afterwards gazetted as a magistrate of the territory.

On their arrival at home, the family found the new cottage complete in every respect, and fit for inhabitation. The unwearied industry and policy of Beck had also added an enclosure at the sides and front, with neat open paling for a flower-garden: a kitchen-garden had been been already formed, by the parting off of a small piece of the cultivated ground in the flat.

The increase ot the sheep being sufficient for forming two full flocks of lambs, these were now weaned and running at fresh stations; so that now there were altogether six flocks: two of these were carried out some distance ahead, the others remained at the stations already established.

The overseer was "too good a judge" to take advantage of his having entire control on the farm, for showing any increased severity to the Welshman: he knew that any such procedure would tell against himself; whilst, on the other hand, the conduct of everything without disturbance, and the entire neglect of such an opportunity of molesting the bullock-driver, would speak as strongly in his favour. It was quite in vain, therefore, that the

more impatient and short-sighted Morgan Brown urged him to seize this opportunity for entrapping the Welshman! Martin knew that such a step in the absence of Lieutenant Bracton would be closely scrutinized by the police magistrate, and perhaps dragged to a second examination on the return of the family. He was determined to "finish off" his man effectually the next time he made the attempt; and the virulent malignity he indulged in towards him was so undisguised, both to Brown and himself, that it was indeed foreign to his character to take a second hasty and incomplete step.

A few days after the return of the lieutenant and his family, and towards the close of one of the last warm days of the summer, Martin Beck rode leisurely over the ridge at the back of Coolarama Creek hut, and down the hill obliquely (to break the descent), towards the hut and stockyard. The stockman was out, but the hutkeeper, in the customary style of his order (which is almost without exception composed of the laziest fellows in the colony), was taking his afternoon lounge: he lay half asleep on his little flock pallet, extended along the rude berth, formed of round sapling uprights with their bark on, with similar side and cross-pieces covered with a sheet of bark, on which the bedding was laid. The black entered unperceived; leaving his horse to graze on the fine green sward that gradually forms around a station where the ground is tolerably moist.

"Hollo, Rowley!" he cried, stammering as usual. "What, taking a bandge? You hutkeepeers do it up rummy. I wish I could get such a chance. Where's Morgan?"

"He'll be here directly; he told me to keep his dinner at the fire for him," replied the hutkeeper, drowsily, throwing his arms abroad from his face, over which they had been gathered to break the strong light of the afternoon sun slanting full in at the low door. "I'm thinking there'll be enough for us all to do directly. We'll all have to leave off bandging it for a bit."

"How's that?"

"Oh! our cove's coming to muster all the cattle on the run."

"The deuce he is! What's that for?"

"Sold three hundred head to some 'free object' that's just come to the colony. So," he continued—for the principals had not allowed him to become fully informed as to the actual matter of fact, though it was impossible to prevent him from having certain notions of his own about them—"if you and Morgan don't look out, I judge there'll be a screw loose. I think Morgan wants to see you,—shouldn't wonder if he hasn't gone over to your place now. He asked if you had been here, and then galloped off in a precious hurry."

To these remarks the overseer made no reply, further than an almost inaudible expression of surprise and vexation; but stooping, he passed out again through the low doorway, and after listening for a few seconds in various directions, walked restlessly to and fro in front of the hut.

At length, the clatter of a horse's hoofs rising the range on the opposite side at a quick pace arrested his attention; and in a few minutes the rider's straw hat, and then his figure, and his horses, became visible over the top of the hill: Beck recognised the stockman. Breaking, as customary, the steepness of the descent by an oblique course, Morgan Brown was seen approaching with the single spur, short stirrups, and gathered whip, characteristic of his occupation; urging his horse more rapidly than some riders would think safe, where the foothold was only on loose stones. Jumping off his horse as it reached the level, but leaving the saddle and bridle on, and turning it to "pick" on the short grass round the hut, he came forward. A single glance in each other's faces sufficed to effect an understanding that there was something amiss.

"Something must be done, my hearty! and that directly," said the stockman. "My cove's very near here: if he's not already got on to the run, he can't be above a day's stage off, at most. Warraghi Bill rode eighteen hours yesterday to get a day ahead of him, to tell me he was coming; but he travels so sharp that there's no knowing, after all, if he wasn't close on Warraghi's horse's tail all day. However, he's a precious 'lushington,' that's one thing; and if he comes through Ghiagong he'll never get by Peter Burne's without half a dozen of champagne."

"Does Warraghi know anything about my cattle?" inquired Beck, in a tone of irritation. "Warraghi's not a sound man to my thinking."

"No," replied the stockman; "but he does about mine. You are always afraid of *yourself*, Mr. Blueskin, no matter to you if every stockman in the quarter got lagged, so as you didn't yourself."

"That's as *you* say."

"Well, it's no use jawing about that now. Something must be done."

"Well, what is it to be?"

"There's one thing," said Morgan; "they're all together." Checking himself, he turned to the hutkeeper, who had come outside to join the conference: "The milking cattle are just over the hill, Rowley; you had better drive them up to the yard before they wander off again.—I don't know what to make of that fellow," he added, as soon as the hutkeeper was out of hearing; "he doesn't know much, but what he does know is too much. I'm not afraid of his saying anything to the cove; but he's very thick with your bullock-driver, and I expect they have their yarns about us."

"I don't see the harm, after all, of them few head stopping on your run. Who's to know who claims 'em?"

"Why, that's just the very thing," rejoined Morgan. "Here's my cove coming to pick out three hundred head for a sale he's made: he'll be all over the run in about six hours. He was surveying in this part for two or three years, and there's hardly a tree

from one end of the bush to the other that he doesn't know; so that he'll be down in every gully, and up over every range. And, my word, if there's a thing to be seen he'll see it; for he's got an eye in his head like a hawk. Then, when he comes home to the hut, it'll be—'Morgan Brown, where did all those young cattle branded MB and MB in a circle, come from? Who owns them?' '*I'm sure I don't know, sir!*' 'Don't know! That's queer: about a dozen head, all under eighteen months, and no mothers with 'em! not a single aged beast among them! All picked cattle too! first-rate cattle! And all heifers!—that's what I look at. Where, in the name of the pipers, did they come from? Now, Morgan, do you think such a lot as that ever singled out of a herd and wandered here of themselves? Come, come, Mr. Brown, don't gammon green: tell us all about it.' There,—that'll be just how he'll go on. Then, what am I to say?"

"Well, if your cove's what you say, the sooner they're moved the better: I didn't know till now that he was such a good judge of cattle. But where are they to go to? If they're taken away by themselves, they'll be off. The one half of 'em will never be gathered again."

"They'd better go into that mob of mountaineers that always runs separate from your quiet cattle in the ranges."

"But the two mobs are always joining, and often stay together in the flat for the half day at a stretch, when the 'Russians' come down to the creek to water; and there's no water anywhere else now, you know."

"And then you think the Welshman will see 'em?"

"Of course."

"Well, then, why don't you put him somewhere, where he'll have a better job? Is a fellow always to live in fear of his life, through him? If I was in your place, I'd soon be level chalks with him."

"Ah! easier said than done," replied the black. "However, we can do this little business safe enough. We'll take 'em off your run, and drive 'em into our wild mob, and let 'em come down among the quiet cattle if they will. The cove himself just knows as much which are his own cattle as if he'd bought them to-morrow. If the Durham bull was to be branded for his next-door neighbour, he'd never notice it: he neither takes notice of beasts nor brands; so there's no fear of *his* knowing any of the lot again. And I'll persuade him to send the Welshman shepherding for a few days at one of the out-stations, till your governor is off to Sydney again."

"You'd a great deal best take and get that Welshman out of the way: if you don't, worse 'll come of it. Now mind what I tell you, Martin;—see if my words don't come true."

"Well, well; I've told you, the first chance I can get, I will. But I won't make any more mulls: next time I try, it must be done clean work. Let's be off, and run these heifers over to one of the camping grounds."

"Where do your mountaineers camp, now the pipe-clay creek is dry?"

"They're making a new camping ground about a mile back from the creek, over the first range; where that large sandy flat is with the black wattles in."

"Come, then," said Brown. And away they both started, to execute their project; which, as the reader will have understood, was that of securing themselves from detection by either Morgan's master on the one hand, or the proprietor of the Rocky Springs on the other.

Morgan, who took care of Martin's booty, was allowed by him to brand an odd beast now and then out of the Rocky Springs herd for himself; and the whole lot had now to be kept off Morgan's run till his master was gone down the country again: at the same time, care had to be taken to prevent the cattle being recognised by the Welshman on Lieutenant Bracton's run. But this piece of cunning was destined to defeat itself. The Welshman would still have continued to suppose that the MBs were brands of members of the family, if he had remained at his ordinary occupation and observed them; but the very circumstance of his being sent shepherding, was the first of the train of events that terminated in Martin Beck's detection and ruin.

After the cattle had been satisfactorily disposed of, the overseer went on to compass his second point, of getting John Thomas out of the way. He was depending on one of the shepherds who was ill, giving up his flock to go to hospital; and on there being no spare hand to supply his place at the time but the bullock-driver. The sick man was one of a lot of prisoners who had been assigned; and Martin, before returning to the farm, rode round to the station where he was, and suggested to him that he ought not to trifle with his disorder; hinting that, if he really felt ill enough to go to hospital, he would take care that he had some tea, sugar, and tobacco, and a few shillings in his pocket. This proved effectual; and next morning, by breakfast time, the man was at the farm, and reported himself too ill to take out his flock.

Lieutenant Bracton, after giving him a "pass" to the nearest hospital (nearly a hundred miles away), had to inform the overseer of the necessity for sending out a substitute, and to consult him as to who it could be. The wily black easily convinced him that no other man then on the farm, but the Welshman, could be spared; and instantly sent to summon John Thomas, that he might receive orders to proceed to the station and take charge of the flock, from Lieutenant Bracton himself, and thus have no appeal.

John Thomas, who was by no means careful to maintain the same amiable temper in the presence of Mr. Bracton as he invariably did before the ladies, received his orders with a very bad grace.

"Tam the sheep! there is never any luck where it is—cutting up the grass like a locust, and leaving nothing for the poor beasts to drink; and driving away the cattle: going 'alking about everywhere,

and the cattle 'ont feed after it. I never hire again for general service. I never have hire till this time for anything but bullock-driving; nor I never hire no more for anything but that."

The opening imprecation was uttered as he stood facing Lieutenant Bracton and the overseer, and the concluding declaration was completed at about a hundred yards off, as he passed through the doorway of his hut; though he had not ceased speaking. He thus avoided hearing any comments which Mr. Bracton might have to make, either as master or magistrate.

From the sentiments just expressed by John Thomas, it will be concluded that both sheep and shepherds are in very ill favour with the stockmen in our Australian colonies, as well as with the bullock-drivers: such is the case. Cattle almost invariably refuse to feed after sheep; and thus, wandering restlessly over the ground where sheep have passed, frequently get far away from where they ought to be, and give incalculable trouble to the men employed in looking after them. The consequence is, a settled feud between those who tend cattle and those who tend sheep: little entertained by the shepherds, however, because their flocks suffer no annoyance from the passage of cattle over their run; but very strongly felt by the stock-keepers, in consequence of the aversion manifested by their herds at the transit of sheep over their feeding-ground, or the approach of a flock to their water-holes. The annoyance, indeed, occasioned by sheep to horned cattle is sometimes so great, that they will even charge the flock, and scatter it in all directions. Consequently, no task could have been found for the Welshman which he would have set about so reluctantly, and have obstinately gone on performing with such a dogged and perverse disregard to all but the mere form, as this. There was probably nothing else he could have been set to do, in doing which his first thought would not have been his employer's advantage; but in shepherding he only felt that the sheep were "*a curse wherever they went.*" Whatever became of them, he would take care of his bullocks; keeping on their track, and not letting them get scattered apart; and wherever he could find the best feed, driving them to it, and keeping the sheep away. Now, these two occupations of shepherd and bullock-watchman, it was impossible for John Thomas, or any one else, to perform adequately together: hence the difficulties into which he was hastening to throw himself.

The expedient of the cattle-stealers to avoid immediate detection proved thus far successful; the surveyor gathered his lot of cattle, and delivered them to the purchaser's stockman, and returned to Sydney; nor did any one belonging to the Rocky Springs (except Martin himself) notice the strange MB brands among the cattle.

And now that important period to all connected in any way with horned cattle, the annual branding-day, approached, when the bullock-driver sees the whole herd together. If there be one more likely to turn out a strong and kindly worker than another,

he can point it out, and get leave to bring it under the yoke. The stock-keeper, too, has on that day to give a full account of how he has executed his trust: he must show the produce of every cow, or account for its non-appearance; and he must find a mother for every calf, or give good reason for her absence. Without such a system, indeed, it would be impossible for a settler to retain his cattle and their increase. The settler himself, therefore, also looks upon the annual muster, or branding-day, as it is frequently called, as one of the most important in the twelve months; all unbranded beasts over six months old, and often under, being on that day marked with the owner's initials, or other marks. In the establishments of the elder settlers, these branding-days are conducted with no little ceremony; everything goes forward in a settled form, and every one has his appointed office. The records are most exactly kept, and most carefully appealed to; every beast being examined, as described by his or her marks in the stockbook: if female, and possessed of a this year's calf, that calf is minutely described, and booked to her.

In short, everything is done that will act as a stringent check upon the notorious and admitted predatory inclinations of the stockmen. Of course, none of these men will acknowledge any particular act of an illegal nature; but they never think of disputing the general truth that "they do a little when they have a chance." This vigorous system of "taking stock"—or rather of *keeping* it—never gives them the slightest offence; whilst it is absolutely indispensable to the possessors of large herds.

As yet, neither the extent of his herd nor an acquaintance with the habits of other farms had led Lieutenant Bracton to adopt this rigid style of muster: the operation of branding and the formality of a yearly gathering were the chief elements in his notion of a muster-day. He was, moreover, of an easy, generous, and unsuspicious nature.

On the previous evening, all the cattle which could be readily got at, big and little, wild and tame, were driven together by Martin Beck, Morgan Brown, Dubbo, and several other of the nearest stockmen; for on these occasions they help each other alternately. The whole herd were then secured in the yard for the night.

In the morning, soon after sunrise, a three-log fire was kindled just outside the stockyard fence, contiguous to one of the strong round corner-posts: the iron brands were laid in order before it, and the long catching-rope and pole placed ready, close at hand. Soon afterwards the gathering for the day's work commenced: Lieutenant Bracton made his appearance from the cottage; whereupon Martin, Morgan, and Dubbo jumped down from off the rails where they had been sitting, into the dusty yard.

"Who's going to rope?" asks Dubbo. The Black takes the roping-stick, which is handed to him through the rails by one of the subs outside.

This roping-stick, or catching-pole, as it is indiscriminately

called, is a thin sapling of the best wood that can be procured from the bush near at hand, twelve or fifteen feet in length, just large enough at one end to be handily managed by both hands, and having a small fork at the other. Over the forked extremity the slip-noose of the catching-rope is hung, the rope itself being brought loosely down along the pole towards the person using it, with the far end trailing on the ground.

Slowly, cautiously, and stealthily the black creeps up, partly behind, and partly off to the side of a young steer, holding in front the catching pole (its treacherous noose somewhat elevated) with loose arms, but firm grasp. The noose comes level, with the steer's head; then in a moment down it goes over his head and round his neck, close home to the shoulders: the pole drops clear, leaving the rope only in the roper's hands; the steer gives a rush, and the noose is tight. The beast plunges round the yard, forcing his way into the midst of the struggling multitude whose turn is to come, and rushes to the length of the rope, trying to break it. But all is in vain; the rope is now round the corner-post, half a dozen strong men are at the end of it, and every time he slackens it in his careerings, they take in the slack and hold on till he slackens it again. At length, between his own misdirected struggles, and the urging of those around him, his head is dragged hard up against the post. The leg-rope is now passed round his hind legs; which, in like manner, are dragged up to one of the smaller posts. "The brand! the brand!" shouts the overseer, and instantly a man stationed for the purpose hands the iron handle of the red-hot instrument through the fence to the operator; who, selecting the most flat place on the shoulder, holds it firmly on, whilst a white smoke curls upwards into the air, filling it with a nauseous odour; the baffled and tortured animal moaning and soughing with the pain. In a quarter of a minute the instrument has done its work; for on withdrawing it, the skin is seen marked with the initials of its owner, destitute of hair, and scorched. Then the leg-rope is first cautiously unloosed; next the neck-rope is slackened, and the stockmen falling back, the terrified and smarting steer, becoming sensible that he is free, extricates his head, and hurries away into the thickest of the herd.

But the black is determined to brand that ferocious slate-coloured monster of seven years old, that has been several times trying to chase everybody out of the yard. He is buffalo-bred, with a hump over his shoulders like a dromedary's; his body, almost as long as two beasts, deep-chested, and short-legged for his breed, but as flat as two deal boards clapped together: a sour-looking brute, neither fit for knife nor yoke. He is the leader of the wildest mob, and turns and faces the dogs when being driven into bounds. He has long been a sharp irritant of the stockmen's bile; and none the less so that his rough, dark hide is yet clear of a brand: hitherto he has defied conquest.

"You'll never get him, Martin," cries Morgan Brown.

"It's him or me for it now," says the black; "now I've taken a

fancy to him. One of you chaps that's doing nothing, run down to my hut and fetch that black fellow's waddie: it's under the berth."

The Australian waddie, it may be explained, for the benefit of those who have never seen the weapon, is virtually a club, whatever particular form the taste of some individual warrior may give it. It is not possible always to distinguish the *waddie* from the *nullah-nullah*, on account of the minute transitions by which they pass into one another. Probably, however, the nullah-nullah is of mace or axe form; whilst the waddie is strictly a staff. Its length is from twenty-one inches to two feet, and it is invariably formed of the toughest, hardest, and most ponderous wood that can be got; indeed, some of these waddies, when taken into the hand, give the idea of so much metal. That now sent for by Martin was of full length, tapering out slightly at first from the hand, but at about three-fifths of its length swelling suddenly into a bulk of three inches in diameter, and then falling off as suddenly to an apex.

"That'll send the old Dustman (such was the cant name the animal's colour had obtained him) to sleep, Martin: only take care you don't miss your mark," said the messenger, as he tossed the waddie over to the Black; who by this time had got all ready again for roping.

"You'd better mind what you're after, Blueskin," shouted Warraghi Bill, who just then rode up to the side of the yard: "he's a rum customer: he chased me three miles one afternoon."

"Hunt 'em all up, Dubbo," said the Black, "and get him just a little way in the tail of 'em: not too far; but where I can reach him."

As he was directed, the Dubliner crowded the mob in which the huge, sulky-looking animal stood, over to one side of the yard; and swept in another little group at his heels. But no sooner had he done so than the beast, suspecting the purpose, or annoyed by the confinement, forced himself face about, and holding up his head above the rest for an instant, suddenly lowered it, and pushed through and charged full at his adversary. Dubbo, who saw what was coming, ran for the fence, and was over the top just time enough to save himself from being impaled by the long horns, or jammed by the flat and massive head of the beast, as it came crush against one of the middle rails, riving it nearly through.

"Better rails than you thought, my old boy," shouted the Black; "some of my putting up! Ay, come again!" Down went the monster's head, as he turned and saw this second antagonist, and shut his eyes for another rush. "Come on: let's see what you can do," yelled the black, as he hastily flung down the rope and pole, and retained only the waddie, which he held a few inches from the end, and balanced lightly some inches above his shoulder, by an arm that looked like a short section of a twisted cable. The furious beast burst forward with a suppressed bellow, blowing

up a cloud of dust; and the Black, making a short agile spring sideways, delivered the knob of the waddie with seemingly slight exertion, but unwavering aim, full on to the curl of the forehead of the mountain giant. Down went the huge brute on his side with a dead lumbering sound, and lay wildly kicking at the feet of his unequal foe. In an instant the waddie was thrown aside, and the slip noose tightened round the horns of the stunned animal, and fast secured round the corner post; the whole strength of hands about the yard being employed to take in the slack.

"Nobly done, Martin!" exclaimed Lieutenant Bracton, who had stood watching, as an old sea-officer may be supposed to look on at such a feat, to see whether his overseer's courage would hold out.

"Oh! I'm used to these customers, sir," said the black, vauntingly, but respectfully. "Here, my hearties! if he won't get up, we'll finish him where he is. Another rope,—the new green hide one." Still, though Martin kicked the beast and twisted his tail, he refused to move; perhaps dizzy with the blow. The hide rope being brought was quickly passed and tightened round the root of his spreading horns, and carried across and made fast to one of the posts of the gate; so that, in the event of his now rising, he was restrained by two ropes in opposite directions. In another minute a rope was round his hind fetlocks, and being passed forward between them was carried up between his fore-legs, and round his neck, and again back between his hind legs, which were thus drawn as close up to his chest as possible; four of the hands holding on. As many more as could be spared, with the serviceable addition of the master—who was equal to any three in the yard, Martin excepted—finally threw themselves, kneeling on the beast's flank, or held down his head.

"Now for the brand!. Hold fast all of you," cried the Black, and planting his foot on the upper part of the fore-leg of the animal to hold the muscles steady, he again applied the heated iron, which singed the hair, scorched the hide, and was withdrawn. Not a movement did the grim but vanquished savage make; not a groan did he utter; but his dim blue eyeball, bloodshot with rage and pain, glared like lurid flame. "Now, hold on, all of you! cried the black, "till I get the rope ready for slipping, and this green hide-rope off." The men and master retained their places till the second catching rope was off, and the leg-rope so far released that it would slip free in the effort of the beast to rise. "No, he's not awake yet: lay down that leg-rope! Easy, easy: be smart over the fence. There!" exclaimed the black, when they were all out, as he stooped behind the old Russian's head and slackened the first noose, expanding it so that it would clear his horns; "there! now you may go." And no longer needing to be any more than a spectator, he startled the animal by a dab in the face with his broad-leafed straw-hat, and before the beast could spring to his feet was up on the top of one of the posts. For one instant after he regained his feet, the infuriated animal looked

round; and then at one wild bound cleared the fence at the lower end. Loud were the shouts that followed him, and fierce the bay of the pack at his heels; but only faster and fiercer flew the enormous brute towards the hills; whilst numbers of his comrades left behind in the yard, and no longer restrained by the presence of men amongst them, crowded to the side from which he had escaped, seeking an outlet to follow him.

Much in the same way proceeded the branding throughout the day; but no more beasts so formidable as the last had to be dealt with. About four o'clock in the afternoon, the overseer, after going through the herd, pronounced that all which needed it were branded; the common hands then strolled off one by one to their huts, and Lieutenant Bracton walked home to the cottage. Martin, Morgan, Dubbo, and Warraghi alone remained in the yard.

"Why did you leave that black-and-white calf, Blueskin?" inquired Dubbo.

"Can't you guess?" asked Morgan, laughing, forgetting that Warraghi was not high in Martin's estimation as to trustiness; "that's an MB you know."

Martin made a sign to the speaker, but it was too late. "Here," continued Morgan, with a view to atone for his inadvertency, "we can brand her without the catching-rope; you fetch the brand, Martin, while Warraghi, Dubbo, and I 'll catch her and throw her, against you come back."

Martin instantly perceived that this was a stratagem to make Warraghi a participator in the felonious act, and thus secure his secresy once for all, and he hastened readily off to his hut for the brand: whilst Warraghi, thus appealed to, had no alternative but to concur, or by refusing proclaim himself a "square" man, and be sent to Coventry by all the stockmen in the district. The calf was soon caught and thrown; and a few seconds sufficed to heat the brand sufficiently for so young a beast.

At the instant after Dubbo had handed the heated brand through the fence, the Welshman walked up to his side, and placing his arms on one of the rails, looked quietly on, saying nothing. Dubbo 'a-hem'd!' again and again; but the three who were engaged with the calf were too closely occupied to notice the intended intimation. To have given any more intelligible token would have only drawn the Welshman's notice to what was going on, more effectually than it might be already; so Dubbo could do no more. The branding over, the three stood back, and the little animal sprang up and ran bleating to its mother.

Then for the first time Martin, Morgan, and Warraghi observed the Welshman to have been a looker-on. For an instant they all stood confounded; but the Welshman broke silence, speaking very civilly: for though a bullock-driver is a supreme and irresponsible authority on the road, he is nobody at the stockyard.

"That old brindled bullock of mine, lads—she is very poor: her bones is almost come through her skin. Get her out of the yard

as quick as you can; you know she have had nothing to eat, and have not been to water since last night."

"It shall be done, John," quickly replied Dubbo, in a most courteous and flattering tone, shrewdly apprehending that the Welshman, somehow or other, did not understand what had been going on before his very eyes. And on his moving quickly towards the slip rails, and taking them down, Martin and his coadjutors inside the yard immediately drove out the whole mob, at once conceiving that the best thing now was to get the stolen calf off into the bush as speedily as possible.

As regarded the Welshman, it was just as Dubbo had imagined. Hearing from Warraghi, who passed his station that morning, that the cattle were in for muster ever since the night before, John Thomas had handed over his sheep to his hut-keeper (though this was quite contrary to rule), and had come partly to see if Martin had found and reclaimed the mob that used to be about Coolarama Creek run, and partly to get any of his own workers turned out that night, in case the branding should not be completed in one day, and the herd consequently kept yarded another night. However, he had seen as he came along the mob of MBs, or most of them, which he supposed were Mrs. and Miss Bracton's, and in the black and white calf now branded before his face he only saw another added to the ladies' stock.

The Welshman's interpetration of the MBs, however, was still entirely unsuspected by the stockmen: yet so civilly had he spoken, that they could not believe he was aware of its real signification. It was several minutes after the initiated four had got into Martin's hut and began to smoke, before they could make out what to say about it; even to one another. The first who broke silence was Morgan Brown.

"Well, this is a rum go; isn't it?"

"Ay," responded Martin.

"If he noticed the brand of that single beast, you're in for the whole lot, Martin," continued Morgan.

"How am I in for the *whole* lot?" retorted the black; sneeringly emphasizing the word "whole."

"Well, all I mean to say is, somebody or other is in for all with the same brand."

"I don't believe," suggested Dubbo, "he saw what brand it was."

"I wouldn't trust him for that: he's wider awake than he lets on to be," replied Morgan. "There's but one thing to be done, Martin; and done it must be if we don't want to be done ourselves. That calf must be 'put on one side.' Dubbo and Warraghi can run all the other MBs off towards their stations as they go home—they lie just in their way—and keep 'em out of sight till you see whether there's anything up: and you and I must go and single off that calf and put it out of the way."

It was unanimously agreed that this was the most prudent plan. One of Martin's partisans at the big hut was consequently

instructed (though without telling him the reason) to keep a sharp look-out whether John Thomas went to the cottage, and what sort of communication, if any, he had with the family. Dubbo and Warraghi, having had their tea and lit their pipes, saddled and rode off to manage their part of the business; and presently afterwards the overseer and Morgan Brown also mounted and departed.

The dusk of evening had now set in, and the weather changed from sultry heat to a fast drizzling rain. The grass was already saturated with wet, and the ground began to get plashy and greasy under the horses' feet. The herd, hungry from their fast, were grazing greedily along in straggling groups down the flat, half a mile below: some down in the creek, the better to get at the rank feed on its edge; others in the middle of the flat, and a few right over on the better grass growing in the moist ground that had the drainage from the opposite range. With as little noise as possible, to avoid attracting notice, Martin and Morgan gathered all the herd together, and made the best of their way with them for a couple of miles onward toward the river. "Now," said Morgan, "we'll single out the calf and her mother, and run 'em up this easy slope on to the top, where there's a creek that runs down about three miles to a hollow of rocks: that'll be the place. They'll drive well down the creek." On receiving Martin's assent, he rode over with his own dog, a strong knowing colley, to the wing where the cow and calf were moving along, and pointed out the cow to him. "There, Tallboy! fetch her out, There, there! not that one:—there, the black cow: good fellow! turn her again! put her away." The rest of the herd scampered off at full speed, and the cow stood at bay with her calf at her side, unable to make her escape. The other cattle now out of the way, Martin let the rest of the dogs fall on, and the cow with her terrified calf took the only way left open, and bolted straight forward for the range; on reaching it, the well-trained dogs, still at her heels, spread round on either side, leaving her no other course than to face up the easy slope of the range to the top; whence the animal sped forward at a running pace down the creek to the rock-girt hollow. It was but a few acres in extent, quite flat and treeless, swampy in the middle, and covered with rank growing rushes, with here and there a broken line of bunches of flags, marking the wettest part. At the further end of the oval was a gap in the rocky barrier, where the waters poured into it by the creek found an outlet; but so filled was this channel with huge blocks of stone, rounded by the wear of the waters and slippery with wet moss, that there was no possibility of the cow carrying her calf through it. Towards it, however, she plunged, followed by the horsemen and dogs, through the soft ground; the heavier animals sometimes sinking half-leg deep: but at the stone-blocked gap her flight was at an end, and she turned and faced her pursuers, the calf seeking protection beneath her belly. "Now, pin her!" shouted the stockman to the farm bulldog.—"No! no! Crabb;

not the young one, the old woman. That's the boy!" Creeping almost on his face close up to the cow's nose, Crabb had made one "grab," and got hold of the poor animal by the cartilage between the nostrils, and thus held her motionless; for the agony of a dog's bite on this sensitive part of horned cattle is such, that, when thus seized, they frequently submit and remain motionless, rather than aggravate the torture by a struggle. The hunters, jumping off their horses, quickly removed the calf, bleating and bounding, from the shelter of its mother; and it was so exhausted by its long run that the two could easily hold it. The cow, however, in spite of her suffering, was no sooner deprived of her calf, and excited by its cries, than she tossed her head wildly aloft to throw off the dog; but the fierce bulldog, true to his instinct, held fast, though surged back violently against the ground. "Put all the dogs on the cursed brute, Martin; she'll be loose directly, and 'll spike one of us," growled Morgan, who now alone had hold of the calf, in stifled tones.

"I'll be shot if I like," replied the black; "it's a precious cowardly job, this."

"Hey, hey! sowl her, boys!" roared Morgan: and on went the whole pack, seizing the poor beast by the ears, nose, and even eyelids. Morgan threw his leg over the calf at a little behind the shoulders, and seizing one of its budding horns with his right hand and its under jaw with his left, he suddenly gave the nose one fierce wrench round upwards, and it lay dead at his feet: in a minute his knife was out, and the bit of hide which had been so lately scorched by the brand was flayed off and in his pocket. The confederates, now calling off the dogs, jumped once more into their saddles, soaked and dripping with the rain, and made the best of their way each to his home, leaving the poor cow to starve and moan through the wet and gusty night over her lifeless calf.

"I'll go down to-morrow, Blueskin, and burn the carcass. It wont do to let it stop there," said Morgan, before they separated. Both felt glad that so much of security at least had been achieved.

In proportion to the cowardice in man is the amount of cruelty he may be tempted to perpetrate in the endeavour to escape a threatening danger. Morgan Brown was a coward at all points; personal danger terrified him no less than the endangerment of his circumstances, position, and desires; the black, on the contrary, was sound to the core in all matters of physical peril, though infinitely more alive than even Morgan to anything threatening his reputation, influence, and possessions. Morgan lived jollily on through all dangers, except when something brought them to his recollection, and awoke his fears: Martin lived in a perpetual secret consciousness of his jeopardy; his terror of detection was alleviated by no forgetfulness; and his malignity toward the Welshman was as continuous and unwavering as his apprehensions for himself were acute. He had no pity for him, though he

revolted against the cruelty which Morgan made so little of towards the dumb animals.

From the time of this occurrence, the black began to feel that there was an urgency in the danger which he had not considered before. He now became sensible of the fact that, besides the actual probable danger, there was yet another,—the possible: a thousand unforeseen accidents might occur, any one of which would ensure his detection; and his restless and energetic mind began unconsciously to ponder what could be done to break up the array of circumstances around him, and reconstruct them to his own advantage. In this temper, he needed but little urging from Morgan to proceed to summary and strenuous measures for getting rid of the Welshman. That intellectual intuition which belongs equally to vicious and virtuous passion had guided Morgan, before he had left Martin five minutes on the evening of the branding-day, to the only expedient available to avert his danger; which he felt was such that it was narrowing in upon him silently every day. "Out of this part the Welshman must go," said Morgan to himself, "and this is the time. Now he's shepherding, there's a chance to trap him that there'll never be again." It was some time before he could nerve himself to break it to Martin; but at length he did.

"Blueskin, how is it to be? Are we to get lagged?"

"You know best, I suppose," replied Martin; "not yet exactly prepared what to determine on."

"Is the Welshman to stop here, and 'nose' all, or is he not? There, that's the point."

"Can you get Captain Bracton to let him go? or get him to go, if Captain Bracton is willing to let him?"

"Both."

"You can! I wish you'd tell me how."

"If Master John Hurley sends him, I suppose he'll go, wont he? That is, provided a Queen's messenger goes with him."

"Ay! but how'll you persuade Master John to do this?"

"I suppose, if Captain Bracton lets him go, Mr. Hurley isn't so much in love with him but what he'll send him: that is, you know, with a good reason."

"Well! but how?—how? You've either got something very deep to come, Brown, or else you're a precious flat."

"Give his sheep the scab; and when they've got it well out, tell him of some of his bullocks being on the Government road; and, my word, he'll break the act directly."

The black saw in an instant that Morgan had indeed suggested a feasible project. Had he happened to think of it first himself, it would have appeared but little objectionable; but suggested by another, it staggered him for an instant.

A colonial regulation, prohibiting infected sheep from travelling on the public roads during certain months was in force: it would be an easy thing to entrap the unsuspicious and obstinate Welshman into a violation of it; and the regulation was considered so

important by both settlers and magistrates, that an offender would have little chance of escape if guilty of a breach of it.

"Well," said Martin, at last, "I suppose that must be it. And it serves him right. *He knows as much about me as I know myself* —does he?"

"Ay," replied Morgan; "that was the very word he said."

"What business has he to mind me? Oh, I hadn't forgot it, Morgan; I was only waiting for the chance. This will do, I think: I didn't think you'd got such a gift, old man. And now how can it be managed?"

"Why, out beyond me about twenty miles, there is a station where the sheep have got the scab bad: very bad indeed; and the master is a regular screw—half-starves the Government hands. I know one fellow that's got a flock next us: he's half a natural, and looks as if a good gust of wind would blow him to pieces—a proper fat Jack of the bone-house: but that's the lad that knows how to eat. Now, I'll just ride over and gammon him that I want a feed at his hut, just in the end of the week when his rations are all gone; and when he says it's empty bags, I'll condole with him, and tell him that if he'll feed his sheep over to my place, I'll give him a good lump of beef. He's as good as old cheese to come, and then let one of your chaps tell the Welshman some of his bullocks are lying in the creek about my hut; and there he'll come driving over red-hot the next morning, dogging his sheep along as if they were kangaroos, and run slap into the scabby flock. Will that work?"

"Yes, well."

"It's to be so, then?"

"I don't care," said the black; "if it will do for you, it will do for me: he's brought it all on himself. And as for Captain Bracton, I've done everything to make a good farm for him that any overseer could do: but I'm getting sick of it, Morgan."

In the course of a few days, Morgan Brown was as good as his word. He had three of the Welshman's bullocks in the creek above the Coolarama Creek hut; and he had the diseased flock camped, in the heat of noon, under the trees behind the hut; so that John Thomas, when he came for his bullocks, driving his sheep over the hill-top, should run unawares into the midst of them. The consequence would be that the mingled flocks must be run into the stockyard and drafted by hand; which is done by catching all the sheep of the smallest flock, and putting them outside, whilst the other flock is left untouched within. It thus involved a couple of hours of the closest and most contaminating contact.

The Welshman's consternation at this occurrence was so intense, that he thought no more of his bullocks, but drove back to his run in headlong haste, immediately he had got the diseased sheep draughted away from his own. Under such circumstances, shepherds are sure to keep their own counsel; Morgan's hut-keeper was a fellow-countryman of John Thomas's, and therefore equally sure to be silent upon the subject. Morgan, whilst he really held

his tongue for his own purposes, took advantage of his promise of silence to intimate to the Welshman that one good turn deserved another.

Some little time elapsed, as usual, before the virulent and contagious disease began to manifest itself: an interval full of remorseful anxiety to John Thomas. Yet so inveterate was the self-will of his character, that these painful feelings effected no change in his habits: wherever he could hear of one of his team having strayed, thither he followed with his flock, and sought it.

At length he could see one and another of the sheep, when the heat of the day came on, standing rubbing against trees; then, after a few days more, numbers were to be seen thus occupied at the same time. Martin and Morgan occasionally rode across his run; and soon discerned how successful had been their base expedient. The Welshman caught one and another of the flock that exhibited signs of the disease, before turning out in the morning; and there surely enough it was, plainly marked by a crimson flush upon the skin. Presently the animals began to leave tufts of the fleece behind them on any rough surface against which they had rubbed: not mere locks of shed wool, but fragments of their coat itself fallen out by the roots. And many, to the practised eye, exhibited the patch of bald skin with a bit of the fleece displaced by the inflammatory action, hanging down broad as a man's hand. One day the Welshman pointed out the consequences of his journey to the stockman, bitterly lamenting the disaster: but Morgan only gave him the cold comfort that the best thing he could now do, was to make the diseased state of his flock known to the overseer or master as quickly as he could.

"Do you mean to tell 'em where the sheep got it, Taffy?" asked Brown, sarcastically: well knowing that the unlucky man meant to do nothing of the sort, and implying that, as he could tell, therefore he had him in his power.

Meantime, the other flock at the station had contracted the disorder, from using the same run, or putting their heads and necks into contact with each other through the slight fence of boughs. And, for some unexplained reason, the overseer, before the appearance of the disease in all its virulence in the Welshman's flock, had sent one flock to a fresh station and brought another into its place.

Scarcely had John Thomas given information to the overseer of the condition in which he found his flock, when the other shepherd, who had been shifted from the station where they were, added the tidings that his sheep also were exhibiting signs of infection. A like report was given in from the shepherd who had been last stationed with the Welshman: and finally, the fourth flock, which had been brought into contiguity with the second, was added to the ruinous catalogue.

Meantime, every possible effort was apparently made by the overseer to stay the progress of the mischief: complete separation

of the sound from unsound flocks was promptly effected: and remedial measures were seemingly applied; but all to no purpose.

First of all, the sheep began to drop two or three a-day; then the rate went on to six or seven, and the numbers daily increased as the whole four flocks contributed their quota of deaths together; in short, they died in such numbers, and in such a corrupt state, that the usual custom of skinning and preserving the skin for the tanner, was no longer thought of. The dogs, gorged to the utmost, could hardly be made to follow the flocks by day or watch them in the yards by night; every water-hole was polluted by one or more putrid carcasses, and the very air of the runs was tainted by the intolerable stench. Bush-dogs were to be seen prowling solitary along, and carrion-birds flocked from all the surrounding parts, hopping about in wanton companies, chattering and sated, in the full blaze of noon. It became necessary to resort to extraordinary means to subdue the nuisance by burning the carcasses; and large many-logged fires were then to be seen blazing and cracking in all directions, on which the putrid sheep were piled and consumed, emitting a loathsome smoke that hung about among the trees like a pestilential fog; whilst in other spots, where the fires had burnt out, there were great black patches of charcoal and white calcined bones. Everybody who had had sheep in the vicinity had removed them, and a cordon of solitude was drawn round the place of desolation.

The feelings of the several individuals of the family, whose property and hold upon social rank were undergoing this cruel shock, were as various on the occasion as their characters were diverse. Although the Welshman would not acknowledge an acquaintance with the origin of the evil, the mere circumstance of his flock being first diseased inculpated him. Marianna refused to believe him culpable without proof; but neither her father, her mother, nor her cousin, could resist the fact itself, and the few but telling comments of Martin. Lieutenant Bracton and his wife felt the catastrophe keenly, from its bearing on their children. Katharine's sorrow arose almost wholly from sympathy with her beloved relatives: she grieved that so calamitous an occurrence should becloud their prospects, till she almost lost sight of the cloud it threw upon her own. Marianna almost forgot it was a calamity, in her solicitude that it might not turn out to have been occasioned by the Welshman; whose simplicity, readiness to serve her, and partial dependence upon her protection, had rendered him so great a favourite. And as it happened, it suited no one of all those who knew the cause of the mischief, to state what they knew on the subject.

Meantime, the advice which was sure to be given to Lieutenant Bracton under the circumstances, by all his acquaintances out of as well as in the magistracy, was tendered plentifully. He was told that shepherds, entrusted as they are with such an amount of property, of a kind so easily injured, must positively be restrained from following their own thoughtless impulses, and when placed

on a clean run must be made to keep upon it. He was also told that old hands always play on the new settler, and that the only remedy was in stringent measures; and he was counselled at once to make it known to his shepherds, that if, after the caution, any one of them was detected off his run, the utmost penalty dictated by the law would be enforced.

His duty became clearer to the lieutenant every day, as the doleful report of his losses came in to him. His principle of government had always been to allow his men the utmost immunity that could be tolerated; but to hold irrevocable the threat with which he limited license. And when he at length felt it necessary to act on the counsels given him, he explained this in the most unmistakeable terms to his men.

The whole period seemed to be one destined to painful recollections, purposely adapted, on the one hand, to rouse energy, or, on the other, to prove the little knot of colonists unequal to their enterprise, and force them back to a position requiring less fortitude, and less strenuous exertion. A quantity of the cattle having been drafted off from the home herd, had been sent to Manaroo, under the charge of a new stock-keeper, with instructions to occupy a tract of land some few miles from Reuben Kable's. With the stock-keeper went also a hut-keeper and a bullock-driver, with a team adapted for the earliest services of such a station; the hut-keeper was quite a new hand.

A few mornings after the arrival of the party at their destination, the hut-keeper was requested by the bullock-driver (who happened to fancy he had just then something else to do), to fetch in the working cattle for him. It was one of those little acts of mutual accommodation which are always freely performed amongst working hands in the colony, and the hut-keeper started.

It had become the winter of the year: and in these regions, differently from those adjacent to the north of Sydney, very heavy snows occasionally fall. When the poor fellow went out on his errand, however, no change of weather was contemplated, otherwise he would not have been sent. More than one or two terrible tales of bewilderment and starvation on these vast plains were already current; and, if recollected in connexion with the dulness of the morning, would probably have prevented him from being exposed to a danger which the most practised and most cautious bushmen, with all their tact, often barely evade.

However, forth he went (and it was some solace to them afterwards to recollect it), "reading his book." He was a Romanist, and much given to perusing some little devotional books he possessed, the first thing in the morning and the last at night. It is but too true, however painful to be acknowledged, that no one is ever seen recognising by morning or evening prayer the existence and dominion of the Divine Being in these bush huts. The evil is so overwhelming in proportion to the good, that if in any single mind the latter haply succeeds in effecting a feeble perpetuation of itself, it is universally within the mind only; all outward

manifestations vanish. And in all probability, these morning and evening studies of the hut-keeper were really outward forms of the transition state.

The bullocks ought to have been about three miles away upon, or on one of the sides of, a fine sweep of hill. From that spot and from all the open plain lying betwixt it and the hut, the hut, which was on a rising ground also, was clearly visible in ordinary states of the weather.

Indeed, no one but a "new chum" could have missed the course from the feeding ground to the hut, even in thick weather, for there was on each side of it a line of low hill. The traveller along the scope of plain, having once fixed its grand natural feature in his mind, had nothing to do but resolutely abstain from rising a hill, and he must make the hut.

Soon after the hapless man set forth, a light sprinkling of snow began to fall, but it was so little, and the air as yet so still, that it suggested no uneasy apprehensions about him. As he could have his breakfast after they were gone out on their several duties, the two other men, leaving his quart pot of tea at the fire, sat down and had their own breakfast. On rising from it, however, and opening the hut-door, they observed that the snow was coming down so rapidly and in such large flakes, that the ground was already covered two or three inches deep, and nothing could be seen at a couple of hundred yards away.

Immediately struck with what *might* occur, through the ignorance of their hut-mate of everything connected with bushmanship, they both hurried off in search of him, taking the middle of the flat, at some distance from each other, with an agreement that whichever of them met with him should koo-eh.

As they drew near the spot where the bullocks ought to have been, each with growing uneasiness listened for the koo-eh of the other, and so on, right up to the cattle themselves. The cattle were where they had generally bedded, standing apparently wondering they were not fetched in yet. But there was no sign of the man; no tracks anywhere about on the new-fallen snow save those of the bullocks themselves; and his hut-mates now looked at each other in dismay and painful anticipation of the catastrophe.

The wind grew more and more boisterous every minute; they crossed the broad, bleak top of the hill in all directions; swept round the sides and base; shouted, met, looked at each other. The stockman hurried home for his horse and the whole of the dogs, whilst the bullock-driver swept, in larger and larger circuits, round the hill. The morning crept on to noon; noon to afternoon; the snow accumulated deeper and deeper upon the ground; other stations were visited and other stockmen engaged in the search: but night came, and the hapless man was missing still.

After an almost sleepless night, they rose again, and again traversed scores of miles of the still snow-covered surface. And so that day passed—and another, and another. And then the

search was given up; and, so far as the weather permitted, the ordinary business of the station gone on with.

Several weeks elapsed, each day wearing slowly out the melancholy impression; but yet that impression was frequently renewed for a time, as chance visitants from other stations inquired, over the evening fire, whether they had heard anything yet of their hut-keeper, and speculated upon his fate.

At length, when the snow had melted and the finer weather came, and the gullies began to be more traversed, he was found—or rather some bones were found—partly in and partly out of a stump-hole in the but of a large old hollow trunk of standing timber. The clothing he wore was of the sort worn by the prisoners generally, and therefore could indicate no identity; but within the stump-hole there was his book, lying open on its face. He had probably wandered till nature was exhausted, and possibly found food for the immortal mind long after the cravings of the mortal part of humanity had ceased.

CHAPTER XIII.

Old Margaret, the Convict Nurse.—John Bradshawe, the Rum-seller.—Death in the bush.—Confession: but not at full length.

GREAT changes had in the mean time been taking place at Broken Bay.

One thing, however, changed not—or it changed only into a riper maturity: this was Mary Kable's love for Katharine Bracton. The more Mary thought about Katharine, the more she cherished the remembrance of her. Vague wonder sometimes arose in Mary's mind, that nature should have cast her lot so far apart from one whom it seemed so congenial to her to delight in: so necessary to her entire happiness to know and be bound up with in life. It was the first time in her life that more than the repinings of a minute had chequered the healthy and exuberant joyfulness of her heart; and many were the little tokens of the feeling she now inadvertently exhibited. Hitherto she had never been otherwise than perfectly contented with herself; but now, if Katharine could have been the schoolmistress, she would have gone to school twenty years longer.

"This cousin of yours must be a very remarkable person, Willoughby," said Kable, one day.

"She is: she is everything, both in character and person, that one could demand in a woman."

"Why didn't you manage to come into possession, then? Surely you've had chance enough."

"Just for this very good reason—because she wouldn't have me. She always said she was a twelvemonth older than I."

"A very clever way, upon my word, of putting you on one side," said Reuben, laughing.

"Don't believe him, brother," interposed Mary; "he told me one day that it is because Katharine is frightened of the sea—of the danger, you know, to her husband, if a sailor; and therefore could not entertain the thought of marrying one. I think it is very natural indeed: I should feel so too—that is, if I were not engaged beforehand—if I had not become engaged—engaged, you know, without thinking of it," she continued, with rapidly deepening blush, and at last looking boldly up, and betaking herself to an ingenuous laugh to get out of the scrape.

Amongst the more material changes at Brisbane Water, was the return of the old nurse from her sojourn in Mangrove Creek, to the hearth of her adopted children. Much of this faithful woman's history and character has already been given; a few sentences will supply the remainder. Many instances of corresponding character will occur to the memory of any one who has long resided in the Australian colonies. She came of a family in good circumstances in the county of Yorkshire. But her voyage to New South Wales was made in the condition of a convict. What were the intervening events that produced this transition, she possibly told the mother of her adopted children: but all *they* knew of Margaret beyond what is already made known was, that she had a little son, which she had been deprived of by the operation of the transport regulations. Whether she had a husband or not, or whether she had had one and he was dead; or, indeed, anything whatsoever on the subject, neither Reuben nor Mary Kable had ever heard, either from their mother or from Margaret herself. All that part of her sad history was, as it were, a leaf in the book of her life, pasted down;—a page defaced, and, for some untold reason, not readable. But yet all she was, or said, or did, tended to nullify the effect of this sad mystery: a woman purer in heart and mind, gentler in thought and word, one would not desire to meet with. On her arrival and assignment to the Kables, she was about six-and-twenty, whilst Reuben's mother, who also was a Yorkshire woman, was about thirty. And so unearned by vice of character appeared the dark destiny of the young woman to her mistress—and especially as understanding its severity, from her own position as a mother—that she could never treat Margaret as a convict servant: she treated her rather like some friend and old associate, who had sought shelter beneath her roof from a sudden storm. Margaret did whatever she chose, and this was always what her mistress would have asked her to do. Dealing with Reuben always by persuasion, without any admixture of the repulsiveness of command, she had more virtual control over the boy than his parents themselves. A true womanly spirit always holds a spell over a fine masculine nature, even in its earliest childhood, to which it yields as it will to nothing else. This might partly account for the young Yorkshire woman's influence over the boy. When death suddenly levelled the main

pillar of the house, Margaret became the active director of the affairs of the farm: and, as the consoler of the widow's grief, soothed the wounds of a heart whose sensibility she knew so well, by her own experience of its kindnesses. Margaret had tended Reuben since he was four years old—allowing herself, at times, in the blind yearning of a maternal instinct, to forget he was not her own: and when "the lytel lass" was ushered into the world, amidst the painful pageantries of death, in that lonely wilderness, where not another white woman was to be found, all thoughts of parting between the two who were there were for ever at an end. It is astonishing, also, how a common provincial dialect often assimilates the feelings, and wishes, and designs of persons in a foreign land.

Margaret was now obliged to take upon herself the out-door responsibilities of the season; and with the straightforward, firm-spirited boy as her deputy, she directed what the men were to do on the land, and amongst the few cattle which the family possessed. At length her friend herself (for she could never be properly called her mistress, and now less than ever) sank back into our native clay. From that time Margaret had been the mistress of the farm and the guardian of the children: and lovingly and prudently had she discharged her trust.

The only variation of the usual habitudes of Margaret's character displayed itself in her marriage to old John Bradshawe. This man had for years chosen to attach himself to the farm; probably because his wages were as good as he could get elsewhere, and sure on demand; and because he was allowed to do what he pleased. He was a very hard-working man, and well skilled in agriculture, but griping; and a professor of that shrewish sort of honesty which confines itself to a simple literal regard to the precept of the law, "Thou shalt not steal." But this peculiarity Margaret did not perceive. Moreover, she reflected that some day there might be a young mistress at Reuben's hearth: and the long-sleeping pride of her character awoke at the thought of becoming secondary, in a house for which she had done as much as if it had been her own: she could not divine that a Katharine Bracton would come to this remote quarter of the world. John Bradshawe had long been her humble suitor: but those who are the humblest suitors before marriage, are ever the most self-willed despots afterwards. And this Margaret found; for in the course of a very few months a notion seized the old man to try his fortune as a rum-seller on Mangrove Creek; and no persuasions could induce him to give up the scheme.

Mangrove Creek is a good large stream, penetrating in its desultory windings far back amidst the mountains. It was towards the upper extreme that Bradshawe settled himself, where only little patches of grass appear betwixt it and the bases of the mountains; the steep and stony declivities of which, indeed, sometimes advance to the very water's edge. Here and there, as its solitary course is traced upward, a little swamp is met with, falling

back into the hills, and perhaps irregularly cut by the perpendicular banks of some smaller streamlet, half-stagnant in summer, save when moved by the rising and falling of the ocean tides;—for so low does the ground lie, that the ebb and flow of the sea is felt far into Mangrove and its tributary streams. Far up on the mountains the timber gradually dwarfs in many places into mere scrub; but their bases are clad with many a noble sweep of forest. On the low ground of the banks, however, and in the swamps of the tributaries—especially at some distance back, amid the thick leaf-strewn and grassless solitudes of the ravines, down which the minor streams find their way—the timber is magnificent: so magnificent that it is felt at once to be the workmanship of more than mortal hands. Some of these trees are so majestic, that a stage has to be erected at a considerable distance from the ground, before the saw and axe of the timber-getters can be brought to act on a part of the barrel sufficiently moderate in girth for the length of the tools. It was to these wild bushmen and to the few settlers of the poorest class who had located themselves thereabouts, without any regular licence, or on learing cleases from larger proprietors, that John Bradshawe chose to constitute himself publican.

And here, after several years of the orderless and stormy life that attends such an undertaking, he was taken suddenly ill: no medical aid was near; and in a few hours his hard-earned and equivocal gains were no longer his. According to custom, some one volunteered to nail a few boards together; and in a few hours afterwards he was where he would be seen no more. His hut was on the bank of the main creek, just beside the mouth of a minor one; and a little way back into the ravine, where a patch of swamp oak trees covered about half an acre of flat surface between the water and the hill, they dug him a grave. A man who, but for the excitement of the commencing carouse, would not have aspired to the office, read, or attempted to read, the service for the dead: the mould was shovelled back into the grave, and all other obsequies were left to the winds, and the long tresses of fibres that the Australian oak puts forth instead of leaves: these sung on their low plaintive wail through the night, and do evermore when the wind visits them. At the hut the carouse went on over the keg from dark till daylight, and from daylight again till dark.

Margaret Bradshawe had taken what coin and notes her deceased husband had left behind; and, abandoning the place whose scenes had so long revolted her, and brought on a premature decrepitude, had taken refuge in a neighbouring hut, where at least there was the shape of one of her sex. Hut, utensils, bedding, liquors, were all left to any fate that might befall them. The fierce but not ruffianly fellows drank up all the rum, and ate up all the provisions, and smoked out all the tobacco, and then, clubbing together, raised as much as they calculated "they had done damage;" and, after carefully fastening up the hut, they sent the money to

the widow, by the individual whom the majority agreed in decreeing to be the most "decent sort of chap" amongst the number.

Thus, once more alone in the world, though not without pecuniary resources, the old nurse sent a messenger to inform Reuben of her situation. The young Australian borrowed a neighbour's boat, and, rolling up his shirt sleeves, pulled away for Mangrove Creek: and well do the youths of the country row a boat on their native streams. Rounding point after point, and clearing reach after reach, and skimming past headland and hill, Reuben reached his goal as the last shadows of evening began to envelop in darkness the picturesque and varied scenery. On the following evening, at nightfall, Margaret was again sitting by the hearth whose peacefulness and purity were the implantations of her own spirit. She had many years before received a conditional pardon; but as such are merely an emancipation of the territorial extent, it was beyond her power to revisit Europe in search of her child. Nor was there any great probability that, if she could have done so, her search would have been attended by success.

The next, and a still greater change that took place in the circumstances of the little party at Brisbane Water, during the twelvemonth that terminated at the Rocky Springs with the infection of Lieutenant Bracton's flocks, was that of Willoughby undertaking to proceed to the South Seas in command of a whaling vessel belonging to one of the Sydney merchants. His reputation for seamanship and for activity of character had soon become a matter of notoriety amongst such merchants as had formerly been commanders of vessels themselves; and at length one of the partners in the firm with which he dealt for general stores, knowing that he had had several years' experience as an officer in the northern fishery, proposed to him to take charge of a vessel about to be dispatched by the house on a whaling voyage in the South Seas. As Reuben had already effected everything required for the present on his friend's ground, and Margaret would henceforth be resident with his sister, he readily agreed to look after the sloop and its trade, whilst his friend embraced the fresh and unexpected opportunity that had opened before him.

Mary had her sad thoughts; but she no longer urged them on her brother or his friend: or, at all events, if Willoughby knew of them, Reuben did not. And now the parting day drew near; nay, was come. Willoughby had given up the sloop to Reuben, as its next run was to be some distance up the Hawkesbury, and had come down by one of the other Brisbane Water boats, to pack the last few articles he meant to take for conveyance to Port Jackson, where his vessel lay waiting only for his going on board to heave her anchor. The boat he came by was one of the washing-tub sort, and, meeting with bad weather, had knocked about for two nights and a day off Broken Bay Heads, without being able to get in. Impatient of the delay, and being a much better seaman than any other on board, Willoughby had been nearly all the while on deck, and much of the time at the rudder; and when

at last he reached the cottage, and looked in without seeing its young mistress, he doubled up his pilot-coat for a pillow, and threw himself on the settle beneath the verandah, where he was soon fast asleep.

It was towards noon, and Willoughby might have been asleep some time, when Mary came home from her stroll in the neighbouring bush, forgetful, for the time, of her trouble, cheerful and agile. Taking off her bonnet as she turned the corner of the verandah, she suddenly stopped on seeing the sleeper, looked upon him with delight, and called him by name. But he spoke not, nor moved. "Asleep! poor fellow, he's tired: I'll not wake him." And she stepped lightly forward on tiptoe, and knelt down and contemplated his face. It was bronzed and weather-beaten though so young, but very calm; now and then a smile seemed to dawn upon it, and then disappear. Presently the lips moved, but uttered nothing; and a sigh followed, ruffling by its strong volume the tresses of the kneeling girl; and then a word was heard confusedly murmured, but not to be mistaken, "Mary, Mary." It seemed to her as if, whilst the body slept so soundly, the spirit rested not, but was striving vainly to press the slumbering organs into its service. Again the lips moved, "Daisy, Daisy!"

"Oh, and bless you, too!" fervently exclaimed the Australian girl; and she leant forward and kissed the cheek of her beloved.

"When wilt th' come back to me again, honie?" she said, playfully adopting the old nurse's phrase of fondness.

"To-night, to-night," murmured the sleeper.

"Nay, that were indeed too soon."

"To-morrow, to-morrow."

"He cannot be dreaming!" said Mary, in alarm, half aloud, as she sprang up and hastened into the house, with only a single glance back as she passed through the door.

Vexed with herself, and perplexed, Mary had a mind to tell old Jemmy, or ask Margaret, to go and awaken Willoughby, and bid him to come in and have his lunch. But she could not satisfy herself to disturb his rest, for what she was conscious would be rather an expedient for discovering whether he really was asleep, than on account of the importance of giving him some immediate refreshment. At length he awoke of himself, and came in.

"And is this cloth spread for me? Shall I look under the cover?" he asked, very quickly, after the first greetings were passed.

"Yes, the cloth is spread for you;—who else? Don't you always find something ready for you, when I know you're at hand? And now you have been sleeping there half the morning, I suppose; for I found you there quite sound asleep an hour ago. I had a great mind to awaken you."

"I 'm very glad you did not."

"Why?"

"I can't tell you that."

"Oh, do tell me!"

"If you promise not to be jealous," said Willoughby, with jocose gravity.

"Oh, if that's it, have your lunch first, and then tell me."

As soon as lunch was terminated, the young man was informed that the "Daisy's" patience would hold out no longer.

"Well," he said, "I dreamed I was in Canton; and I thought I slept in a cool bower of evergreens; and all was lone and still, as if every one of human birth had departed from the world. But ever and anon I heard the rushing swell of seas; and amidst the great scarlet flowers of the evergreens there came and went others of a soft and creamy white; and at every change they grew more like fair women's faces. And then, in the twinkling of an eye (but how I knew not), the flowers, and the sound of seas, and all were gone; but in their place there stood at my side a lady of a beauty so magical, that I forgot even where I was, and began to ask her whether she were not one of the daughters of the sons of men who lived before the flood. But before I could make known what I had to say, she knew it, and spoke herself. I have no memory of what it was she answered; and yet I seem to feel, even now, the waving of her tresses about my face as she shook her head and corrected my thoughts;—for it was something never to be forgotten;—most like the fluttering of the angels' wings that enfold the good man's soul in the moment of its mystery, ere it springs to flee away——"

Here Mary asked some trivial question, and in such a peculiar tone, that, notwithstanding the excited recollections of his dream, he could not but notice it. He rose, and went across to where she stood, looking through the window; and at this unexpected movement she turned her head.

"Hallo! what's this for? You've been crying; what's amiss?"

"No, I hav'n't indeed, Willoughby;—it's only just this minute. It was I that came and stood by you, and spoke to you; and you tried to answer me."

"Well, well! see what foolish things dreams are—complete nonsense! But surely, there's nothing so shocking in that, after all? You're nervous, Polly;—come, cheer up!"

"I am a little nervous to-day, I think. I never was before; was I? I wish you were not going away."

"Come, come;—is it not as bad for me to leave you?"

"No, Willoughby. You know I shall be living here, safe from harm; but I haven't that to think of about you."

"Margaret is coming; make haste, and dry up. If she sees this, I shall have to stop in-doors all the rest of the day, to keep her from giving you a regular 'Hannah More.'"

CHAPTER XIV.

The Distemper among the Sheep—Beck's Ruminations and Project—The Jew's Principles.

THE departure of the young seaman for the South Seas took place just at the period when the insidious and destructive distemper began to show itself among the flocks at the Rocky Springs; he thus escaped the unhappiness of becoming acquainted with the havoc that ensued, until his return. Previously to sailing, he had obtained from Reuben a promise to take the Diandullah mountain in his way, on his next journey to his station at Manaroo: not that Willoughby entertained any suspicion of the integrity and capacity of Martin Beck, whom he still supposed a signal acquisition to Lieutenant Bracton; but for the sake of introducing his relatives and his friend to each other, and of obtaining for them any additional information which the penetrating glance of Reuben might perceive them to be in need of.

As yet, however, Reuben entertained no intention of immediately visiting his cattle-station at Manaroo: his stockman was a practised and trusty hand, who had been long known to him, and on whom, therefore, he could depend without any frequent and close personal superintendence. On the other hand, Willoughby being no longer at Broken Bay, all communication between the two localities was interrupted; save when, at such long intervals as are characteristic of the epistolary correspondence of friends in new countries, some communication passed between Katharine and Mary: for, in the eagerness of youthful attachment, Mary had resolutely asserted her claim to such notice from Katharine; and Katharine, perhaps not displeased that the young gentleman, her cousin, should be successful somewhere, had cheerfully assented. Marianna's opinion of Mary Kable was, that she was "a countrified puss; but would do very well for Willoughby, no doubt."

Many weeks immediately subsequent to Willoughby's departure passed, as we have described, at the Rocky Springs. When the distemper reached its height, it still seemed for a long time as if it would merely continue so. No abatement of the mortality took place.* Four flocks out of six were infected, and the loss on those four was already equal numerically to one entire flock.

Beck, nevertheless, seemed to be using every known means to prevent further contagion, and to restore the animals already labouring under the disease; but to the men this did not appear quite so clear as it did to Lieutenant Bracton. Many eyes

* The cursory student of Australian affairs might very excusably imagine the account of such wholesale devastation exaggerated. It is not so. If I recollect aright, the writer, whose publications I have alluded to in the preface, mentions, in one of the late numbers of his "Journal," a similar, or rather incomparably more, wholesale destruction—viz., of many thousands,

observing, and many minds comparing their observations, detect the actual truth in a very different way from what one observer and thinker can effect of himself; and there is often a peculiar advantage in viewing a case *from the underneath side.* Diseased sheep cause much extra work, and the men interested in the sheep being in a sound state, saw many things that were lost upon their owner. Shepherds, also, frequently become much attached to their flocks, and very readily detect any neglect of their welfare; the shepherds of the last two flocks infected, being together, soon hit upon the searching question—Why the flock, hitherto always kept with the Welshman's should have been removed to another station, just when it had had time to become infected itself, and thus to carry the malady to another sound flock at another station, whilst its remaining sound flock was taken from that station and yarded beside the one that had the malady. Another of the shepherds observing that his sheep exhibited no discernible amendment (though the overseer said they were improving), tested with his tongue the wash used for them, and found that out of the two main ingredients the most important one was wanting. Other little circumstances also were noticed: some said plainly, "Oh, he's not trying to cure the sheep. The master is a man that spares no expense in anything. Everybody else can get their sheep cured; how is it he can't?" Others contented themselves with the more safe expression of their opinions by a shake of the head, or a look of mutual understanding, or the exclamation, "Ah, he's a strange fellow! but you never knew a black but what was." Thus the time went on; and with the time went on the ruin.

Martin Beck's habits were likewise observed to undergo a remarkable change. He no longer worked away, as hitherto he had done, till eleven or twelve o'clock at night. This the master attributed—as indeed did all the family, so natural did it seem—to weariness, occasioned by the long rounds on horseback which he had now to take daily in giving close attention to the flocks. But the men were by no means so charitable in their judgment. Amongst those at the head station itself, Beck, according to a very common custom among these overseers, took care to have two or three retained as standing spies. A little extra ration given by stealth, a lighter task; these were the payments: the gain to the overseer was an immediate acquaintance with everything said about him amongst the men, and the consequent opportunity of guiding himself accordingly.

But if Martin Beck did not work, neither did he sleep: after supper he would throw himself, still dressed, upon his berth, and, leaning back with hands clasped behind his head, moodily gaze at the fire, and grimly ruminate for hours;—often, in fact, till long after midnight. Essentially, he was less a thinker and an artificer of plans than an impulsive doer; and at such times, and under such circumstances, these restless, but not profound minds, prey fearfully upon themselves. He could see clearly enough, that, however well Morgan Brown's turn was in course of being served, his own turn in the main was far from being as much pro-

moted; though everything was tending to fulfil his purpose of bringing a severe sentence on the Welshman, as soon as he could be led into infringing the Act, and thus getting rid of him. He knew very well that, when men universally get a bad opinion of an overseer, they soon make it very definitely known, along with their reasons, to the master. Beck was perfectly sensible what, unless checked, would be the final effect of the opinions the shepherds were expressing about him: his spies, in order to give their services importance, considerably exaggerated what was said among the men; and coloured it to work on the overseer's apprehensiveness. For they knew they were retained for the purpose of enabling the overseer to maintain his influence with his employer, by counteracting any machinations going on against him.

The more Beck ruminated, the more clearly it appeared to him that, whilst John Thomas was in a very safe way of losing his ticket and being sent to Sydney, he also himself was in a fair way of losing his berth as overseer. A more contented and less covetous mind would have acquiesced in such a result with a "Be it so;" rather than seek an alternative in more daring and perilous depredation. But Beck had never allowed full scope to any passion save the love of gain; and he could not brook the thought of being ousted from where he was doing so well. His fair earnings and his secret booty together had now accumulated to the amount of about three hundred pounds. He saw no prospect at all equal elsewhere: moreover, he felt indescribably annoyed at the thought of being made a tool to secure Morgan Brown by the very same act which cut his own throat. The more he considered everything, the more clearly he saw that he had either done a great deal too much, or a great deal too little: something more must be made, or much of what he actually held resigned. To this latter alternative he never once thought of reconciling himself: active, restless, and impulsive, he had always gone ahead hitherto from his childhood; and habit cried "Go on." Beck did not reflect that every step had been at the cost of a new danger; so that a schedule of what he possessed could have been paralleled by a corresponding enumeration of the dangers he had accumulated round himself.

There are times in the on-going of the human nature when the emotional preponderates over the cogitative and intellectual; times when the *thoughts of man's heart* temporarily displace the strict *rational* judgment. Then it is that good spirits murmur heavenly music through the good man's soul, as he sits holding his golden-haired child upon his knee by the evening fireside, and then also it is that bad spirits exert their power upon the evil man. Such times are ordained in the awful councils of eternity, for the purpose of confirming and advancing us in whichsoever way we have chosen, by another class of influences from the spiritual and supersensible world. And such a time approached for Beck.

He was sufficiently intelligent to discriminate between wrong and right; but he cultivated no inclination to do so. The rights of his neighbour were to him nothing, in comparison with self-gratifi-

cation and agrandizement. When he seemed to be doing his duties to others the most zealously, it was because he saw in them the seeds of a harvest of advantage to himself. One better feeling after another had disappeared before his pampered vice of avidity: and now, with his temper irritated by the reflections that crowded in upon him through an inactivity new to him and foreign to his character, he was become fully prepared to secure the safety of himself and his property by any means, no matter how atrocious. Indeed, the question that was before him admitted of no solution, but one of great cost to himself or of great cost to others: the former he could not contemplate for an instant.

Yet the question would still obtrude itself—"*What* was to be done?" For nearly three hours he had lain ruminating, his hands as usual clasped his behind head. The fire had sunk nearly into embers, for the night was close and oppressive; and he rose and commenced putting the smouldering remnants of the logs together; when suddenly a gust of wind came rushing round the end of the hill, forcing its way through the orifices in the chimney, and half smothering him with ashes. He sprang with violence back into the middle of the hut and execrated "everything;" and then throwing the door open, he strode out into the air. All the lights were out about the farm, and all the voices had become still; the breeze, too, had dropped again instantly. "It only came," he ejaculated with a bitter sneering laugh, "because I was trying to put my fire together—because I was just where it could fill my eyes and throat, and nostrils with the ashes." It was one of those nights when the very moonlight itself seems thick and heavy and gloom-like: when men keep saying to each other that there is a scent of sulphur in the air—probably the effect of electric currents on the underlying minerals; but far too fetid to the sense of all in common to be imaginary. "What is it all for?" he muttered again. "For nothing at all. I am doing neither one thing nor another: I am a slave to-day only that I may secure the means of being more a slave to-morrow. The short and the long of it is that I have been a blind man all my life. Other people strive after property as a stepping-stone to something else; and I, like a fool, have been forgetting that there is anything else. That beast Brown works because he wants to drink. Some of these convicts will make straw hats all night, after working all day. But why? Not for the work: they want their smoke of tobacco. This old settler, too, keeps fumbling on at what such a useless old sea-calf can. But it is not for the sake of the thing itself—I can't tell what right these white men had to put me in the yokes this way. My word and honour, if I give 'em a Rowland for an Oliver, its only level chalks after all. Well, I am a dog, and worse than a dog, if I let this go on. Why should I not go back amongst the men and women of my own kind? They would know I was one of themselves: they would not eat *me*. But it won't do yet; I must have more money—I wonder what this ground would fetch without the sheep and cattle. The runs are

settled for sheep for this many a day: nobody would buy them for sheep; and nobody would go to the expense of buying the land either for a cattle station. If it fetched anything like a full price, it must be from some new settler for a homestead. There's very few of them coming out; and its ten to one if any new settler happened to hear of it. I think it would go cheap, if the old chap was going away: and it's fifty to one he would go away and live on his pay, and cut settling, if his cattle got such another drilling as the sheep have got. Fifty black fellows' spears among 'em would do that. Besides, that's the very thing to set all to rights every way. No more Welshmen then. It certainly is a slashing farm; good water, good runs, good timber, good cultivation ground—I wonder whether the old Jew would go halves in the purchase, if it's a bargain, and I can't raise enough? The row's over at the Coal River; I could get those cattle now, and they'll sell for five hundred pounds. Three and five—eight. By jingo! that's as much as the land would fetch—Captain Bracton! visitors, visitors:—some darkies! It's no use querying any more: done it must be, or done I shall be, I can see that." Once more, all was ready for action: Beck's mind was now quite calm again; and he went in and went quietly to his bed.

The next day, soon after noon, Beck rode slowly up to the door of the stores at the township, dismounted, hung his bridle leisurely on the hook, and went in. The old Hebrew was at the very spot he had occupied every day at the same hour for years, when not withdrawn from it by attendance on a customer. This was just at the corner of the stack of goods that ran along the middle of the store; whence he could move directly either to the shelves at the back, or forward to the articles in front, as the occasion might require. Rachael was within, sitting at her work on the little sofa, which extended from the entrance door of the apartment to the window. Above her was a little tier of hanging bookshelves, on which were her few schoolbooks, and some that her friends at the Rocky Springs had lent her (she was now a frequent visitor there), and a very few more which it had not offended against her father's habits of economy for her to purchase for herself since she left school. Her father's Hebrew Testament and Book of Prayer were on the lower shelf, where he could easily reach them for himself: for he was of late becoming rapidly feebler, as well as slightly deaf. On the same shelf also there was a handsome small English Bible; which, when he moved, it was with as much reverence as he handled his own. At times he would even sit down by Rachael, when she had laid aside her work and taken down the little gilt-edged book; and if she read anything aloud from it to him, he was rather gratified than displeased; and seemed full of meditation afterwards. Still the old man's heart clung to his nation; and however much he might feel secretly attracted to the prophet of the Gentiles, he could not avowedly forsake the religion of the Jews. With his daughter the sentiment was the same; but it was cast in a higher and more in-

telligent form. She recognised the religious doctrines of her nation as of undoubted heavenly origin; but she had come to have equally little doubt that they ought now to be looked back at from amidst the light of Christianity.

Marianna had not at all overrated her father's tendencies when she told him that if he knew Rachael he would fall in love with her; for he had not only done so himself, but had incited Mrs. Bracton to do the same. Rachael was felt to be more endeared to them whenever, after her short stay, she anxiously hurried back to her parent. And all this love being poured out upon her—although elicited purely by her own amiable disposition and graceful manners—Rachael had so identified herself with the Bracton family, that, quite looking past herself and her own prospects, their welfare was her welfare, their joys were her joys, their troubles her troubles. Her filial love and duty were not abated; but were brought into a natural and wholesome alternation with other affections. The effect had been very salutary; increasing both her enjoyments and her capacities.

Rachael knew the black's voice well, from her frequent visits to the Rocky Springs: she knew, moreover, Marianna's opinion of him; and Katharine had confessed that to her he was an enigma. Any news from the Rocky Springs had attractions for Rachael; and any derivable from the black excited curiosity as well as interest. Now, that so sad a disaster had fallen upon the property of the family, and when she was thinking of them every hour, everything connected with them and their residence was of double importance to her.

When Martin Beck entered the store, the door of the inner apartment was shut, and no one besides Lazarus Moses himself was visible; he therefore felt no particular need for caution, beyond the doubt as to how his proposal would be received. He entertained the vulgar notions of the Hebrew character, and thought that, if the Jew should reject his proposal at all it would be from unwillingness to be content with a half share where his property would enable him to secure the whole. He did not raise the point whether a Jew would unite with *him* in a speculation of the sort; much less did he discern the possibility of the project being interfered with, through Rachael's intimacy with the Bractons. Upon these and other points, the isolated life of the black, and the contracted experience of the bushman, furnished him with no suggestions: he only saw in the Jew a grasping, greedy money-getter. Rachael, meantime, could hear every sentence the black uttered. The door was, indeed, shut between the sitting apartment and the store; but the loft over the apartment was not partitioned off, and the ceiling of the room (which was the floor of the loft) consisted merely of a light covering laid loosely upon the ceiling joists.

"How is Mr. Moses to-day?" was the initiatory salutation of the overseer.

"Oh! very vell, Mishter Peck; very vell, conshidering: only

dere ish no trade now: it ish all gone—all gone. Vat ish Mishter Practon's order to-day?"

"Nothing to-day for the governor: I'm come over to have a yarn with you myself. We Christians can't get on far without you Jews, you know, Mr. Moses."

"Vat! you call yourself a Kreestean, Mishter Peck? You are only a heathen Kreestean, I tink. No, no! not a Kreestean; that is quite anoder ting," said the old man, quietly laughing between every sentence.

"I can't say about that. I know of a chance, as I think, at all events. What do you say to it, if it seems likely to turn out a good spec?"

"A shance! You know of a shance?"

"Good land, good buildings, and, I dare say, some good cattle."

"I vill puy, if I can puy vort' my monish. Vat ish it? vat ish it?"

"I should think you might almost guess," said Beck.

"No—no; I cannot tink. Vat ish it?"

"I hear some hints dropped that our governor has a notion of dropping farming; going down the country again, and living on his half-pay. This job has taken all the shine out of the sheep."

"Vell?"

"I don't think he'll stand it much longer."

"Vell?"

"And he'll never be such a flat as to let the land lie doing nothing."

"Noting! He vould have his cattle den; and de cattle——"

"Oh!" interrupted the black, unprepared to explain how that part of the business was to be managed, and perplexed for an instant. "He'll never keep a station that's worth so much money for a few milking cattle—sure to sell it, I should say."

"Very goot! Now I tell you; you are a rashcal. Vat! you vant me to covet my neighbour's goots? Ven Mishter Practon shell hish goots, I vill puy 'em.

"Doesn't it come to the same thing, man; when it's well known he *must* sell them? ay, and that before long, if I'm any judge," said the black, irritated by the unconcealed contempt of the old man.

"Vat pusiness you to be any shudge about it? De shentleman's farm ish his own. It ish not mine, nor yours, nor any oder man's, vile he keep it for himshelf. Ven he shay he shell it, den it ish anoder ting."

"Then, even if there's the chance, you'll have nothing to do with it?"

"I don't know: but I vill not sin against my Maker to covet my neighbour's goots. I tell you, Mr. Peck. I vash a very poor boy in London: I haf not von penny but vot I valk about in.—and I go von day and shtand at a great inn in London vere the coaches stop. All de oder Jew boy haf someting to shell—a knife, or a case of razor, or orange, or someting—every von but me. And I vonder; and I ashk my Maker vhy I haf not got someting to shell too? and I pray to him to gif me someting like

the rest of the Jew boy. Vell! mine Got! at that very inshtant a shentleman vat vas vait for the coash turn round and look at me, and beckon to me vid his finger, so; and ven I go to him he shay, —'My poy; vy haf you not got someting to shell—some knife, some orange? Vy are you doing nothing?' And I tell him directly—'I am very poor, sir: Got hash not gif me anyting: my fader and my moder ish dead dis long vhile, and de man vat keep me ish very poor, and haf a goot many shildren.' And he look at me, and put hish hand into hish pocket and gif me half a crown, and shay, 'Dere, go and try and be a great mershant.' Vell, I blesh my Got, and I go avay and I shay I vill never wrong any man: and I puy some orauge, and den some knife, and den some trinket; and den I haf a shop; and Got gif me a goot vife, and my shild; and I make five tousand pound out of dat von half crown. And I never covet my neighbour's goots all that time: only vat vas my own."

This confession of the old man's faith and practice revealed to Beck something so widely different from his own principles and course, that he pursued the negotiation no further; and, after a few hems and haws, betook himself to his saddle again. Recollecting himself, however, just as he was about to mount, he turned to the Jew and said—"I've been trying to do you a good turn; if you won't have it, it can't be helped: but don't go and blow the gaff on me for it."

"No, no," replied the old man; "I haf noting to shay apout any man. It ish your own pusiness, not mine."

For some moments the Jew stood gazing after the black as he rode away; and then turned into the store, and passed through the now half opened door into the little room where Rachael was sitting, and walked to and fro, pausing every now and then, and lifting up his hands, with the exclamation, "Vell! vat a rashcal! vat a rashcal!"

Rachael, as intimated, had heard the whole of the conversation: she felt that it was unworthy conduct on the part of Beck, whom she knew to be treated in the most liberal manner by his employer; his wages having been continually advanced, and many considerable douceurs added to them at various times for special exertions. She knew, moreover, that Mr. Bracton placed a generous and unreserved confidence in Beck; which alone should have restrained him from such a proceeding. Still, she did not fathom the man's baseness as the more experienced mind of age did; and whilst she concurred in her father's feeling, that it was "bad—very bad, indeed," she yet ventured to demur to the strong terms in which her father continued to characterize him.

At length the old man stopped, and thus addressed her—"My shild! I know very vell vhat I shay. De man vat vant me to puy hish mashter's goots, vill vant to make hish master shell hish goots."

Still, the inexperienced and guileless mind of the young woman could not fully comprehend that which, to the long observant mind

of her father, had been clear all along; and she merely replied—"Oh, I hope not."

The maxim in which her father had expressed his opinion conveyed to her no further impression than that he supposed Beck would, for some motive or other, persuade his employer to farm no longer.

CHAPTER XV.

The Welshman again in trouble—Marianna's concern—Visit of the ladies to the Lock-up—Suspicions of Beck.

WHILST this portion of the black's projects was signally unsuccessful, another was as unexpectedly hastening to a temporary fulfilment. Notwithstanding the clear declaration of Lieutenant Bracton that he would excuse no breach of orders, and the strong remonstrances of his own mind, the Welshman could not control his habitual anxiety about his bullocks. Influenced partly by a natural fondness for the cattle, joined to an excess of the feeling of his class, which holds all things to be subordinate to the mystery of bullock-driving, and an aversion for sheep, and partly even by a feeling towards his employer, such as loyal chevaliers indulge in towards their lieges—the *loyauté n'a honte*—the "serve the king at any cost"—John Thomas forgot the standing orders. With the most honest inclination to serve his employer to the utmost, he only thought of doing so in his own way. He was one of those characters which give good help, if kept near to the mind that commands, and led to think as it does: but that, if left to themselves, are apt from the very excess of zeal, to thwart, if not oppose, the plans they should aid. Many a worthy but uncommunicative man loses a good wife by the operation of precisely similar tendencies.

Only a day or two after Martin Beck's interview with the Jew, just as the business of the court was over, and Mr. Hurley and Lieutenant Bracton were about to leave the bench, the lock-up keeper entered, and addressing the latter gentleman, stated that one of his men was just brought in and lodged in the lock-up.

"Who is he?" "What has he been doing?" inquired Lieutenant Bracton and Mr. Hurley together.

"It's that stupid man, again," answered the lock-up keeper, "who was here the other day,—the Welshman. Major Jennings caught him off the run with a diseased flock, and sent one of his own men to drive them home; and ordered his farm-constable to bring the Welshman into the gaol."

"That's very irregular of Major Jennings," observed the superintendent of police, "the man is a ticket-of-leave man. Neither the ticket-of-leave regulations, nor the Act of Council respecting driving diseased sheep, authorises the man being taken to gaol in

that way: he ought to have been summoned, or at least ordered, to attend before the magistrates. Major Jennings, as a magistrate himself, knows that very well; it's a pity he couldn't think of it."

"There's certainly some excuse, Mr. Hurley," said his brother magistrate, "for Major Jennings. I have told him, in common with yourself and several other gentlemen, to take the most summary measures with any of my shepherds they might catch off the runs. I could but do so in simple justice to other flock-holders round, they having had to move their flocks for the present, at great inconvenience to themselves, on my account. I never meant, though, that Mr. Jennings should put my men in custody: he certainly might have referred to me before doing that. When I said, 'deal with them in the most summary manner,' I meant, give them a good horsewhipping, and start them towards home."

"So that in aiming to lead Major Jennings into one irregularity, sir," said Mr. Hurley, with a slight infusion of civil irony, "you have unhappily led him into another."

"It's an annoying circumstance," said Lieutenant Bracton, rather to himself than to his brother magistrate, as he thought of the protectorate which his daughter had lately more than ever exercised in behalf of the Welshman; and without taking any direct notice of the sarcasm which a similar sense of vexation, at having again to deal with the Welshman on so grave a charge, had extorted from Mr. Hurley.

"How is the man in charge, Thompson?" asked Mr. Hurley of the lock-up keeper.

"The farm-constable said, 'Major Jennings says you are to put this man in the lock-up, and he'll come in and prosecute him.'"

"Is he come?" inquired Mr. Hurley.

"No, your worship."

"He knows this is court-day; he has horses, and the constable had to bring the man in afoot. He must have been morally certain that he would find you on the bench, sir," said Mr. Hurley, addressing the concluding sentence to his coadjutor.

"Then you think," rejoined Mr. Bracton, "the man must remain in the lock-up till next court-day?"

"Unless we could try him without his prosecutor," said Mr. Hurley, again slightly expressing in his tone the annoyance he felt.

"Major Jennings is sure to be in on Saturday, sir," said the lock-up keeper, supposing that the annoyance of both the magistrates arose from their uncertainty how long the prisoner might be kept untried. He comes in regularly every Saturday, to look after the men that are building the new public-house for him."

"Let one of the constables go over and inform Major Jennings that the court will sit here the day after to-morrow:—no, stop; that's Thursday:—the day after that, Friday," said the superintendent.

"Won't that be inconvenient to Major Jennings, Mr. Hurley? Won't Saturday be better?" asked Lieutenant Bracton.

"Will it be so to yourself, Mr. Bracton?"

"Oh, not at all."

"Well, then, I really don't see that business which *two* members of the bench must concur in thinking it desirable to have disposed of out of hand, should be left in abeyance to the private arrangements of *one*. Is there any more business?"

"None, sir," said the chief constable.

"The court is over, then."

The diligent, though absent, member of the bench of Ghiagong, had meantime directed his farm-constable to call, on his way with his prisoner to the township, at the Rocky Springs, and leave word what had taken place, and state the necessity of another man being sent out to take charge of John Thomas's flock. The young ladies were on one of their little rambles at the time; and the overseer, to whom the message was delivered, whilst he pretended to commiserate with the Welshman, secretly exulted at the prospect of getting rid of him. But the Welshman well knew how glad Beck was at heart.

Immediately Lieutenant Bracton had mounted his horse and set forward towards home, Mr. Hurley walked across to the store. He had long become on terms of the most friendly intimacy with Rachael. On his first arrival at the township, he had addressed her with the freedom of a superior, tempered only with consideration for her sex; but as he became acquainted with the status which the young Jewess could claim on the score of property, and observed her cultivated understanding and sweet disposition, his demeanour to her had become more respectful, without increasing in formality. Indeed, Rachael's abstinence from resentment of his original familiarity had increased his respect and regard, until at length Rachael and Mr. Hurley seemed on the footing of brother and sister.

"Miss Rachael, Miss Rachael!" exclaimed Mr. Hurley, knocking lustily on the store door as he entered.

"Well, Mr. Hurley, what's the matter now?" asked Rachael, as she came out of the sitting-room.

"Another job for you Rachael, in the commissariat line. That abominable Welshman is in the cells again. There's no Government allowance, you know, till the second day; and then only 'one pound good common bread,' and such water as the prisoner may require. How would you like that for breakfast, lunch, dinner, tea, and supper?"

"Shocking! But what has this poor man been doing now?"

"Oh! no paltry offence at common law this time. He has been running foul of an Act of his Excellency and Council."

"I am no wiser now," said Rachael.

"He has, it appears, been driving his flock on or over, or near a public road. His flock, you know, is one of those Mr. Bracton has lost so many of by the scab; and it is the interdicted season.

I don't know precisely whether that will be the charge against him; but I rather suspect so. I imagine that Major Jennings will not abate a jot of the fact: I never knew him to do so yet."

"Dear me, what a foolish man he is! Was he looking for his bullocks?"——"I can't say."

"Miss Bracton has been predicting this: and saying that she would try to get him taken from the sheep and placed at something else. How grieved Marianna will be. The poor fellow is as undesigning and affectionate as a child."

"Well, there he is over the way, as fast as bolts and the stockade can make him. My duty, Rachael, is often a very painful one. I know he is only a poor headstrong fool; but that does not alter the law."——"Will he get over it?"

"I really can't say: I don't even know what charge the major will make. See that the poor devil gets something to eat. I must go; I have a good deal to do to-day. I have been stirring them up at the colonial secretary's office for some time back for a better station; and I find, from the despatches this morning, that I am likely to have an order to move forward rather unexpectedly; and I may say, not exactly on every point to my satisfaction."

"Oh, no; I dare say not, Mr. Hurley," said Rachael, smiling. "The inevitable postages will almost swallow up the additional salary."

"Ay, ay, Rachael; and on your account too. The fact is, I was just getting to be quite contented; and really only kept making application out of habit. But it will not do to flinch now. I expect I am partly indebted to the major for expediting the business."——"How? I thought you and he were not so friendly."

"That's it. I hold him too close to the law of the case: he likes to make his own law for the occasion. He can't forget that court-martial system of making the words of a statute mean everything or nothing, just as it suits the views of the judges. Bracton is nearly as bad; only he always goes to the right side, whilst the major goes to the wrong. As to their regard to the intention of the Legislature, it is about parallel."

"But why, do you suppose, did the major advance your application?"

"To get rid of the restraint. He keeps an old blue coat, you know, in Sydney (or his washerwoman keeps it for him), and when he goes down he hangs on a pair of those immense old white trousers he has saved, and buttons up the blue coat to the throat, and 'waits upon his Excellency,' as he says. And I have no doubt he has *bonâ fide* given me a lift to serve his own turn. He hinted as much, though without confessing the motive, two or three times. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, Mr. Hurley. I'll not forget to send something over to that poor man."

At the farm the tidings caused sincere regret in all except the overseer and the two or three his satellites. Katharine and Marianna blamed themselves for allowing what they had foreseen to

take place; when, by persuading Lieutenant Bracton to remove the Welshman to some other occupation, they might have prevented it. Mrs. Bracton felt hurt; and poor Biddy was inconsolable. At first they had cherished the confident hope that Mr. Bracton, being now a member of the magistracy, his intercession might be availing; and their disappointment was the deeper at finding that that was an additional reason why he could not interfere.

Lieutenant Bracton had concluded that he could take no part in adjudicating the cause, and manifested an unwillingness to be spoken to about the affair, which it was quite unusual for him to exhibit in his family.

The ladies hoped that Mr. Hurley would call: but day after day passed without his making his appearance; and they did not divine the reason. Marianna's former interference on behalf of the Welshman seemed to herself to have been so effectual that she felt confident of a similar result now; for, notwithstanding Mr. Hurley's protestations, she had always attributed the Welshman's discharge to Mr. Hurley's affection for herself. It was too delightful an error to be other than an insidious one; and one point of her own individual character tended to foster the self-deception —she was largely endowed with self-esteem. Nature and the circumstances of her education had combined to render her paramount in her own little circle; and she had yet to learn that beyond it there were minds impracticable to any force she could bring to bear upon them, and positions to be maintained which could not be yielded without loss of honour. Hitherto, concession had seemed to be an inseparable concomitant of affection for her; and she could not conceive how resistance to her wishes could be an intrinsic part of fidelity to her interests.

On the morning on which the bullock-driver was to be brought before the bench, Marianna, leaving Katharine at home, took one of the men to drive her over to Ghiagong, before her father set out.

"My darling," exclaimed Rachael, as Marianna rushed into her arms, "how beautifully you have dressed to-day! Where did you get those lovely artificial roses? I never saw you look so fresh and handsome. Oh! I know what this is for."

"Indeed, you are mistaken, Rachael," said Marianna, blushing, —fully sensible, we are sorry to say, that Rachael was *not* mistaken. "I have come over about our unlucky protégé. Is Mr. Hurley out of town? He has not been over to our farm for these four days past. I can't think what can be the reason."

"He went out of the township about half an hour ago," said Rachael. "But he has been at home every day hitherto."

"How unfortunate! I want to see him. You know he must get back to the court to-day. Papa will not sit; and Major Jennings cannot, as he is the prosecutor."

"I imagine," said Rachael, "Mr. Hurley is only gone about a dozen miles; and he rides very hard on such occasions. There has been a dray robbery, and I suppose he is gone to glean what information he can on the spot, before giving directions to a party of the

mounted police. Three of them rode off down the road before him. What a good horseman he is!"

"Oh, yes, Rachael: and no less admirable in everything else. I never hint, in the most distant manner, at anything that will oblige me but he arranges it, without another word."

"I am very much afraid you will be disappointed now, Marianna."

"What! about Thomas? Oh, no: indeed, he told me, dearest (to tell you a secret; but you must never let him know that I said anything about it), that he would never refuse me anything if I would seriously consider it over, and could say it was necessary to my happiness. So I am sure that if I could only see him, this affair may be got over. But I really shall tell Thomas that it is the last time: it makes me look quite absurd."

"Do you know what charge Major Jennings means to make?—whether of being off the run merely, or of driving on a public thoroughfare with an infected flock?"

"No. We know nothing beyond the fact that the man is in the cells, and that Major Jennings gave the order for his confinement, and means to give evidence against him. Do *you* know?"

"I am equally uninformed," Rachael replied, "as to what he really did: but information may easily be got from John Thomas himself. The old lock-up keeper is a great admirer of mine: he shows me all the old-world courtesies you can think of whenever chance brings us together. I know he will let us see his prisoner."

"Come, then:—that's what we'll do. I shall know what to say better if I know what the crime is. Make haste. Dear Rachael, you are such a time dressing, always. You're not at all like one of the people that lived in tents till they could steal the land of Canaan. They must have been a deal more smart and off-hand than you are."

"Miss Bracton herself spent no time in dressing this morning, of course," archly replied Rachael from the inner room; and again the carmine flush flew all over Marianna's face; the passing frown and the settled secret smile contending forcibly, with varying preponderance. But she hurried Rachael no further.

In five minutes more the two young ladies had secured from the lock-up keeper permission of access to his prisoner. The gaol was merely a building of wood with the requisite iron fastenings; but it was amply secure for all common purposes of confinement. It stood in the centre of an enclosure formed of heavy palisades, eleven or twelve feet high, the cross-bars of which were on the outside, so as to present no means of climbing it from within; and so well bound together by iron and wood conjunctively, as to admit of no speedy or easy dislodgment. The building itself was in the fashion of the strong slab erections of the country: but each of the cells was lined inside the upright slabs with closely-fitted plank, two inches thick, crossing the perpendicular slabs horizontally; whilst floor and roof were made equally secure by similar materials. A single air-hole in each cell, far above the

height of a man, afforded ventilation, keeping the inmate sufficiently cool of a winter night: indeed, when the snow-storms of the Morrumbidgee set in, the floors of the cells on the weather side were plentifully whitened by morning.

The building contained but four cells, situated at its four corners; the lock-up keeper's rooms occupying the middle. These cells presented no furniture of any description whatsoever, save the mere inevitable fixtures of a place of penal confinement: there was neither stool, nor bed, nor blanket, nor even so much as a raised berth of planks; but only the bare floor. The cell in which the Welshman was confined was one used for ordinary purposes and cases less than felonious; and it had a second door opening into the yard, so as to take the culprits in and out to the court-house with facility. The lock-up keeper's pity for the Welshman, whom he had known long before Lieutenant Bracton became a settler in the district, had supplied the prisoner with an old blanket, threadbare, yellow, and full of holes; but, nevertheless, an acquisition in such a place.

When the lock-up keeper flung open the door, the young ladies saw nothing in the cell except a seemingly shapeless heap enveloped in an old blanket; the door jarred heavily and harshly against the wall, but nothing within the cell gave sign of life or of power of motion.

"Very odd, Miss," said the lock-up keeper, turning to the young Jewess, "how these Welsh people take the sulks. He know's I'm here now; only he knows it's too early for the allowance, and so he won't get up."

Marianna called the Welshman by his name, in a clear thrilling tone, trembling with emotion, as she leaned, almost sinking, on Rachael.

"Miss Mary!" cried the prisoner, as he sprang instantly to his feet and stared half bewildered at his visitors: but here he paused, not knowing what to say. The young ladies, who now for the first time looked into the den of the incarcerated, were for some moments too much moved to speak with the decorum they thought proper to be observed.

"What is it you have been doing, Thomas," asked Marianna, at length, "to get into this trouble?"

"Tam her!" blurted out the bullock-driver, "I only go to find my shafter and bring her home, and she put me in here. She is no man."

"But, my poor fellow," said Marianna, compassionately, "you should'n't have gone off the run, when you know how fully papa is determined to insist on every shepherd keeping within his bounds. Not that this is papa's doing: I am sure he is very sorry."

"Old Whitefoot is a very stupid bullock, Miss; she never mind to keep with any other bullock. She 'ood go away to Port Philip, or the Snowy Mountains, if I have not fetched her back."

"And whereabouts were you?"

"I have not go on Major Jenning's run at all: but head her creek, and keep ever so far away."

"But were you on the public road, or across it?"

"Yes; else how could I get there? I cross the Government road. Yes."

"Then Major Jennings will surely prosecute him under the Act of Council, Marianna," said Rachael.

"Tam her!" repeated the Welshman; "she is no man, I tell you, Miss. I have known when she is so poor, that I am obliged to bring her up a chest of tea and a bag of sugar in my dray, and she never give me only a glass of rum; and everybody tell me if I lose it on the road, she 'ood try and hang me: but that was why I fetch it; because she was so poor, and got nothing to send a dray to Sydney for."

"It certainly is very singular thoughtlessness of Major Jennings, Rachael," said Marianna, not wishing to express her views more strongly before the lock-up keeper. On looking round, however, she observed that the lock-up keeper—probably to indicate his confidence, and manifest his courteous feeling—had gone away. "I cannot think," she proceeded, "what business the old fool had to meddle with one of our men without referring to papa. I think it is a piece of very gross impertinence."

"I imagine," said Rachael, "from what I observed in Mr. Hurley's manner, when speaking about it, that he thinks the same."

"I am sure he would," replied Marianna.

"But," said the Welshman, "I do not blame the major for it all together. It was that black fellow drive my bullock over to that side. What business had she to touch my bullock?"

"You mean the overseer?" asked Marianna.

"Yes, Miss Mary. One of the shepherds tell me my bullock is over there, and she see the black fellow drive her."

"Then depend upon it, Rachael," said Marianna with animation, "he has taken the bullock there to draw Thomas off the run, and get him into this scrape."

"Oh, never, Marianna!" said Rachael; "I do believe he is an evil-spirited man, from what my father says, and, indeed, partly from what I heard myself; but he is only a greedy man. He never could be guilty of such a heinous device as that."

"I am sure of it," emphatically replied Marianna; "I can see through him, and always could."

"Still," Rachael interposed, "you cannot prove it. And is it justifiable to assert what remains so uncertain that it cannot be proved? It is only guessing. We have no right to guess away our neighbour's good name."

"She is too cunning to let you see what she do, Miss," urged the Welshman; "but I know her well. Mister Thompson there have been tell me that she come over that day and make Harry Grimsby put me in gaol."

The young ladies both looked with inquiring surprise into the face of the gaoler; who, having returned, had heard the remark of the Welshman.

"Oh, it's true enough, ladies, so far as I can see," said the lock-

up keeper; "it's well known that Mr. Beck was at the township just before——"

"Why, on that day," observed Marianna to Rachael, "he said that he had lost his horse, and the man was obliged to have papa's to come over on."

"Well he was here, Miss, just before——"

"But was he on horseback?" inquired Rachael, impatiently.

"I can't say that, Miss," answered the lock-up keeper; "it might have been afoot. All we know is, that he sent over for Grimsby to go down to him at the public-house; and then that Grimsby picked a quarrel he had no occasion to pick with this man, and has ever so many times since been heard to say Mr. Beck was a cheat. What dealings could there be between them, if it was'n't about that?"

"And your father also says he is a scoundrel, Rachael. What was his reason?" inquired Marianna. "And you said you had heard something yourself? I must know, Rachael: I am sure there is something about that man very bad indeed."

"Anything I could say," replied Rachael, "would not at all elucidate the matter, and would be a breach of confidence."

"Rachael, that's really very unkind of you. You see I am endeavouring to get some clue to this wretch's character and doings, and you withhold important information from me."

"I do assure you, my dear Marianna," Rachael earnestly pleaded, "all I could say would be merely a confirmation of your suspicions (and not the most serious of them), whilst it would not afford you one jot of truth to help Thomas by."

"Unless you could prove, Miss," interposed the lock-up keeper, addressing Marianna, "that the man's flock was not scabby, or that he was not with them where the major swears, you can do nothing to get him out of it."

The young ladies saw the state of the case now clearly enough; and, after giving the prisoner a few shillings "till he got his wages, and in case he should not be tried that day," Marianna and her friend Rachael returned to the store.

CHAPTER XVI.

Rash conclusions—"Major Jennings in full"—A ticket-of-leave-man on his trial—Idiosyncrasies of Justices—Mr. Hurley's apology.

SHORTLY afterwards Mr. Hurley was seen walking back his panting and lathered horse across the green, by the road on which he had made a rapid journey to the scene of the dray robbery of the night before. The dragoons were no longer with him, but had proceeded across the ranges in pursuit of the marauders.

The labourer who found employment at the store, was imme-

diately despatched to inform Mr. Hurley that the young ladies wished to speak with him for a few moments, most particularly. He returned with a reply from Mr. Hurley that he was exceedingly sorry, but important matters would prevent him from waiting on them till after court.

"This, then," exclaimed Marianna, in a tone of wounded feeling, after a few minutes of silence—which to Rachael, who knew the rapid and energetic movements of her friend's mind, were full of anxious suspense:—"this, then, is Mr. Hurley's promise!"

Rachael herself thought that Mr. Hurley might have come across to them, if even he had refused to make any exertion in furtherance of their suit; but she was too much attached both to him and to Marianna to acknowledge it now. After a short hesitation, she gently urged,—

"My dear Marianna, I know he is very busy just now (for he told me so the other day) about his removal."

"His removal!—And he has told *you*, Miss Moses, and never told us!" exclaimed Marianna, in astonishment; it being the first intimation she had had of the immediate probability of it. "Well! Mr. Hurley and Miss Moses improve, the more one knows of them!" The last words were uttered in that freezing tone in which woman only can speak when she thinks her affections trifled with: it was as when iron blisters by excess of cold. Rachael felt for the instant as if she *had been* guilty of some crime; she was cut to the heart; yet so amazed that she knew not why. The next instant there was a sharp convulsive struggle at her side, and with a sudden exclamation that was at once a shriek and a moan, her beloved friend, amidst all her roses and her loveliness, fell back pale as a corpse at her side.

Meantime, at the opposite side of the green, Lieutenant Bracton rode slowly up to the court-house door, dismounted, gave his horse to the groom, and went in. Immediately afterwards a tall, spare, elderly personage, dressed in nankeens, of very ancient fashion, a black coat which seemed to have seen service in its youth in some *very* old country gentleman's wardrobe, excessively drab-coloured cloth boots, and a dirty white hat, rode up at a shambling pace, to the well-whitened steps of the little portico; then getting his horse deftly side on, by a series of heaves and struggles, he extricated his feet from the stirrups, and his body from the saddle, evincing much gratification at having achieved the descent. Several sonorous "ahems!" followed, increasing in loudness and rapidity of utterance with the great man's impatience, and at last constable Grimsby appeared amidst a perfect profusion of bows, and, without ever once looking this awful presence in the face, took the horse by the bridle, and leading it off into the shade of a tree at a little distance, proceeded to walk it very sedulously to and fro. Major Jennings, putting his hands beneath the tails of his black coat, contemplated for a few seconds the open green before him; and then bristling up and nestling his chin within his stock, and stamping once or twice as it seemed from an irrepressible sensation of protracted juvenility, he smiled

complacently at something he appeared to see going on in vacancy, and went on into court. Presently Mr. Hurley came out from his own apartments with a bundle of folio pamphlets and books under his arm, and hastily made his way in, with something like an angry bearing.

The court-room was a handsome apartment of some forty feet by twenty, the height of a lofty sitting-room; it was wainscoted all round with cedar, breast-high, and whitewashed above. A panelled division, the height of wainscoting, and having a door at either end, crossed the room from side to side, at about a quarter of its length from the further end. Within this enclosure was a large table, covered with green baize, with chairs for the magistrates: the place for the prisoners and witnesses was outside the barrier. Mr. Hurley, as superintendent of police, occupied the central seat; Mr. Bracton usually sat on his right, and Mr. Jennings on his left; but, on this occasion, Mr. Jennings felt it proper to take an equivocal position on the extreme right, at the corner of the table, thus placing Mr. Bracton in the centre. The arrangement, however, seemed not quite satisfactory to Mr. Hurley; for before the prisoner was placed at the bar he stood up and looked fixedly at Mr. Jennings for some few seconds: but that gentleman kept looking steadily forward at the constables and dragoons outside the barrier; and at length Mr. Hurley sat down. By this time the constable had placed the prisoner at the bar.

"What man is that?" inquired the police-magistrate.

"A man of Lieutenant Bracton's, your worship."

"His name and offence?" proceeded the magistrate, placing pens and paper before himself.

"John Thomas, my name," said the Welshman, before the constable could reply.

"Major Jennings sent him to the lock-up, your worship; he don't rightly know what for," continued the constable, endeavouring to be as sarcastic toward the "spotted" magistrate as he could venture to be; for that gentleman was in anything but good repute.

"Oh! then Mr. Jennings is the prosecutor?" said Mr. Hurley; "will you have the goodness to give your deposition, Mr. Jennings?"

"Undoubtedly, sir," replied Mr. Jennings: but still resolutely retaining his place.

"Territory of New South Wales, county of Murray, to-wit," said and wrote the police-magistrate, with the view of drawing Mr. Jennings's attention to the circumstance that he had now to give evidence, and was not acting as a member of the bench; but in vain.

"Marlborough Jennings, Esq., late major——"

"Stop, stop, Mr. Jennings," said the police-magistrate; "I have been waiting to swear you."

"Oh! I thought *my* deposition would be sworn after it was drawn up," said the major, laying a sort of hesitating emphasis on the personal pronoun.

"No; it will be most convenient to put you on your oath at once, sir, *if* (Mr. Hurley continued, pointing with an impatient finger) you will have the goodness to step to the lower end of the table."

There stood the chief constable, holding the New Testament in his hand, with a look of malignant immobility; which, as the major rose, and advancing, extended his hand to take the book, was disturbed by a succession of grim twistings of the risible muscles back into severe gravity.

"Marlborough Jennings, Esq., now of Jennings Court, in the county of Murray, and territory of New South Wales, and late of Barefield House, in the county of Cumberland, South Britain, and late major of local militia——"

"I can't put all that down, you know, major," said Mr. Hurley, relaxing into a tone of humorous familiarity: "it will be a complete family history before we get through it. I should have the attorney-general's head-clerk about my ears by return of post. I am acquainted with your name, I believe, and the title and situation of your seat. Now, will you just state *why* you placed the prisoner at the bar in custody. By-the-by, he is a ticket-of-leave man; and the regular course would have been for you to lodge your complaint before the justices of his district: he would then have had an order through the police to appear and answer for himself. Perhaps you will think of that, in any other like case. Marlborough Jennings, gentleman, of Jennings Court, maketh oath, and saith,——Well?"

Finding that he must positively confine himself to the hard facts, the major forthwith went on to state, what, for the reader's convenience, we may reduce to thus much,—that he, on a day named, met with the prisoner then driving a flock of sheep, infected with scab, at a spot which he could not have reached but by crossing a high road. The worthy deponent was going on still further, to state the danger and damage he apprehended; but Lieutenant Bracton was here seized with such a fit of coughing, shuffling his chair, and blowing his nose, that he bethought himself that it was a little out of place, and saying, "That's all," appended his signature, and returned to his seat.

A short consultation of Lieutenant Bracton with the police magistrate, in an undertone, followed; the former merely deprecating all use of his position. The superintendent of police then referred to an Act of Council, reading it carefully down, as he traced his way on from line to line with his finger; and then, with an expiration of the breath more like a sigh than is usually heard under similar circumstances, he at length laid the Act aside, and called upon the prisoner to make his defence.

"I was go, Mr. Hurley, and fetch my shaft-bullock," began John Thomas.

"Stop. You say, Mr. Jennings, he was but a little way from the road?"

"Very little, indeed," said the major: "I might almost swear he was on it."

"You mean, sir, I suppose, that you could swear he was *almost on* it; not that you could *almost swear* he was on it. 'Almost swearing' is a sort of swearing that is nothing at all inside a court, and a very bad thing everywhere else. I understand you to say that the man was just, and barely, across the road."

"That is what I mean: in fact, some of his sheep, I don't hesitate to say, must have been on the road when I saw them first, and drew over before I got to him."

"And himself—over the road?"

"Oh, yes; right over the road, on the side farthest from his own station, most undoubtedly."

"That you are quite sure of?"

"Oh, most decidedly."

"Well, now, which way were the sheep heading?"

"Some go one way, some go another," said the Welshman: "I just then begin to put 'em all close together to drive 'em, that they may not hurt the run, because I see my bullock up on the side of the range. I send my dog to fetch up the tail of the flock off the road, didn't I, major, when you come up?"

"Hem!" said the young magistrate, from the bottom of his throat, looking round at Mr. Bracton in vexation at the stupidity of the prisoner in affirming the very point he was endeavouring to place in uncertainty. "I thought it was possible, as the man was partly in advance of the flock, that *he* might have gone on without looking back, and the flock have followed *unnoticed by him;*—which would have given his offence a lighter aspect. Go on, my man."

"I was fetch my shaft-bullock, sir, and she is a very stupid beast: she never like to feed along with the other bullocks, but always go on, on, until she lose herself. I have often fetch her when I am down the country, twenty mile away. Another shepherd tell me, sir, that she have seen the black fellow drive her to the wrong side of the run——"

"The black fellow! Who is that?"

"The overseer, sir: she have drive Whitefoot to the side of the run next where she was when she was a calf with her mother; and a beast always make back if she can to that place."

"Did you know you were off your run and so near to a road where you had no business to be?" asked the magistrate, once more suggesting a point for him.

"Oh, yes; I know it very well. But I cannot lose my shaft bullock. I drive my flock as close together as I can to the place."

At this decisive announcement, a buzz of angry astonishment and disappointment went through the clustered officials below the barrier. Mr. Bracton again blew his nose and moved his chair; Mr. Jennings simpered with evident satisfaction to himself; Mr. Hurley sat grave and silent; and the prisoner stood looking as doggedly innocent as if he were waiting to answer the last question in the Welsh catechism. At length Mr. Hurley spoke.

"John Thomas, on evidence, as well as on your own confession, you stand declared by this Court to be guilty of a breach of an

Act of Council—of a most important one. The Court sentences you to be deprived of your ticket-of-leave, and to be returned to Government service in Sydney. Deliver up your ticket."

"I have not got it here. If the constable go to my hut with me, I give it to her."

"Any more cases?"

"None, sir."

"The police may go. Lock-up keeper, I want you."

Mr. Bracton rose and passed out of the court-room, and mounted; Mr. Jennings did the same; and Mr. Hurley followed in a few seconds. A brief communication, as it was taking place before several persons, informed the other magistrates of Mr. Hurley's re-appointment elsewhere. Mr. Jennings, with his usual superabundance of courtesy to his stately coadjutor, and a sneering sort of civility toward the younger magistrate, rode off. Mr. Bracton, supposing his daughter (of whose intentions and reasons he was sometimes far from very categorically informed) to be either returned home, or amusing herself much as usual with Rachael, proceeded in his own direction across the green. Mr. Hurley, with slow and thoughtful step, crossed toward the store.

All was still within: when he knocked and summoned Rachael as usual, some time elapsed before she came; and then it was with sadness on her countenance, and with a noiseless footstep. The tale was easily told. It was long before Rachael had been able to restore her friend to consciousness: then with great difficulty she had partly led, and partly borne her to her own chamber. And there, for some time, paroxysm had followed paroxysm, till the feebleness of the system refused any longer to support the brain in the thought that generated the convulsive energy. The young man listened to the account in dismay and speechless sorrow.

The prudence and delicacy of Rachael withheld all mention of her friend's too sensitive suspicions: she only told Mr. Hurley that Marianna had felt shocked at his apparent disregard of his promise, and the inevitable condemnation and punishment of the culprit.

"I acknowledge most freely," said Mr. Hurley, "that I deliberately avoided the interview. But how could I do otherwise? I was already determined, by my own knowledge of the prisoner's character, to do all I could do honourably in his behalf; anything beyond that I must have refused to do. I know of nothing—not even excepting the present, painful as it is—that would have more deeply wounded me, than to have heard Marianna press her point (which I cannot but fear would have been the case) after I had distinctly stated its incompatibility with my sense of right public conduct: and as to my promise, Rachael, you must be fully sensible yourself, that it referred simply to the divergence of our individual tastes in matters of our own."

"So I understand it," replied Rachael. "But you know how sanguine and imaginative Marianna is; and being high-spirited also, she felt very keenly your refusal to come and speak to her—you should have done that."

"Indeed, dear Rachael, I should not. Do you suppose men's minds are exempt from liability to agitation? and with an agitated mind, be assured, I could have done less even than I did do to help the unfortunate fellow."

The afternoon passed by, and by degrees Marianna recovered her consciousness and composure; but she still continued much too severely affected to return home. In the evening, Katharine also was at her side. No persuasions of either of her two youthful friends were of avail, however, to alter materially her views. She partially yielded to their assurances that she must have misapprehended Mr. Hurley's promise; or that, rather without misunderstanding it, she had inadvertently applied it in a confused way. But, though partially convinced on this head, and now fully assured of Rachael's fidelity, and satisfied that Mr. Hurley had not intentionally avoided informing her of his approaching removal, Marianna still felt *that she was not to him what she once thought she was.* Strongly impressed with this consciousness, she could not bring herself to see Mr. Hurley on the accustomed footing: blameless as he had been.

CHAPTER XVII.

The dying Bushranger—His Tale—His Master's Visit—Farm and Dwelling of an Australian "Naboh"—A Lady's Views of Law—Penal Discipline—Cruelty and Crime—Rationing—Influence of Masters.

Mr. Hurley's occupations for the next few days were such as, if Miss Bracton could have accompanied him through them, would have amply vindicated to her the benevolence of his character.

On returning home one afternoon from a neighbouring station, he found lying in one of the cells a bushranger who had been shot by the police whilst resisting their attempts to capture him. A dray, with a single sheet of bark upon it, bearing frightful tokens of the use it had been applied to, stood in front of the entrance to the stockade; and at the door of the cell where the Welshman had been confined, but from which he was now removed to another, the driver still lingered, gazing at the load he had been called upon to convey; the soldiers were gone into their huts; but both their wives were in the cell with the lock-up keeper, doing such offices for its inmate as the dying require.

The wounded man lay stretched on the bare planking of the floor; the only recognition of his humanity was a pillow, which one of the soldier's wives had brought and placed beneath his head, and a panikin of warm tea with which the other had endeavoured to moisten his lips. And, indeed, these even were almost useless charities, for, by fits, the rigours of approaching dissolution came over him. He appeared about forty years of age; of large frame, much attenuated, however, by hunger and hardship; and

of frank, and even handsome, countenance. The charge had struck him in the right side.

"As you were away, sir, and we didn't know when you would be back," said the lock-up keeper, on Mr. Hurley's arrival, "Grimsby's gone off to tell Dr. Mercer about him. It's one of his own men."

"Very well," said Mr. Hurley: "I suppose nothing more can be now done for him. If he revives at all, let me know. Something strikes me, I have seen that man's face before."

"He's a man that's never been used to work, sir," said the lock-up keeper. "His forehead looks like a scholar's; and there's no mistaking them small hands."

After tea, as all grew still, and the quiet, heavenly light of the almost setting sun shone straight across the earth on to wall and palisade, the lock-up keeper knocked at the magistrate's door. "The prisoner requests to see you, sir." Mr. Hurley put on his hat, and proceeded to the cell.

The wounded man still lay upon the same spot; but had got himself a little elevated. His eyes rolled glassy and wild; and death was upon every lineament: but the traits of his agony were far other than those of one whose nerves are wrung by merely physical suffering. Yet was not the effort given up to maintain fortitude and calmness. After some gasping and vain efforts, he spoke audibly, but with intervals.

"Mr. Hurley:—you are the only person in this accursed country whose face I saw before I came here. I knew you immediately. I saw you on one of your calls at Dr. Mercer's farm: for I am his man!—*his man*, you know!"

"I thought I had seen you before: yet I cannot recollect where."

"There is a solicitor in London, Mr. Hurley, with whose eldest son you were very intimate some eight years ago. I was then his most confidential clerk."

"Vickers? Oh, yes! I remember you well.—Frightful!"

At the strong, involuntary exclamation of the magistrate, a cast of intense, unportrayable anguish seized, for an instant, upon the lineaments of the dying man: but it was as quickly displaced by an effort of the will: and once more a ghastly and terrible serenity was the prevailing expression.

"And *more* than once, if I recollect aright, Mr. Hurley, you have seen my wife and child—a rosy, laughing girl, with jet black hair and as jet black eyes, then about five years old."

"Oh, Vickers! how has this come about?"

"Once," continued the dying man, speaking through close-set teeth, to maintain his composure of countenance, "when I came in from one of the courts, they were waiting for me, and you had my little Eleanor on your knee. Pshaw! Mr. Hurley. It's of no consequence. Don't think about it. I have not done right to remind you of it. My object in asking to see you, is to get you to write the letter for me, that it is desirable should now be sent."

"Dr. Mercer was sent for several hours since. He may yet be successful in saving your life, Vickers."

"The very sight of him will kill me!—Let me tell you at once what I want written. I must tell you first what you asked—How this came about? The practice was transferred to other hands, and I was displaced (as soon as the new comer became well enough acquainted with the clients) to make room for a friend of his own. I was then without a situation for many months. Poverty came, and at last hunger. I could have starved well enough; but I could not see my wife and child starve. Maddened, I committed a forgery. This is the consequence. But ever since I have been here, now five years, I have always written home that everything was going on well; that, by-and-bye, they would see me again. You understand now what I shall want done."

"You wish your wife to be made acquainted with the unhappy event as mildly as possible."

"Oh, dear no. Write first that I am seriously ill; then, in the course of a couple of months, that I am no more. She will remember your name, and it will have the effect of preventing her from imagining anything like the true case. Will you do this?"

"Yes!—You astonish me when you speak as you do about Dr. Mercer. I knew by common report that he was a severe man, but I should have supposed he would have sympathized in your case."

"I cannot go over the circumstances now, Mr. Hurley, that brought his ill-feeling down on me. When once it set in, however, it soon took the form of an intolerable persecution. Then, because the overseer saw it would please the master, his low, ribbald sneers were chimed in, till I could stand it no longer."

"And then you took to the bush?"

"Yes; but not till they sent me out to keep pigs in the bush. I knew nothing about pigs, and lost 'em—lost 'em over and over again, just because I couldn't keep 'em——"

A paroxysm of indignation flashed for an instant on the bush-ranger's face, and another fainting followed, preventing the addition of the words—"and they took me before that young officer at the next station, and gave me fifty lashes for it, as *neglect of duty*."

Some time passed ere the deathlike syncope gave way before the few final stirrings of mortal life. When it did so, his mind, clear and pertinacious, returned to its theme at the exact point where the frail enginery of matter had failed, and refused to give thought further expression.

"What I have suffered, words could not describe. I stole only just so much as to keep me out of the hands of my tyrants. For I was determined never to go back. When I was ordered for court by the Doctor, Mrs. Mercer, I was told by one of the servant girls, said it was a shame to set me about such a job; a shame to flog me for not doing it properly; and there were some high words between them about it. She was the only person on the farm that had not persecuted me; at least, of those who had power to do so. So when it came to that, I thought the sooner I was away the better——"

By-and-bye he continued again:—

"Dr. Mercer, Mr. Hurley, is my murderer. I was well inclined to have lived quietly out my term of servitude, but he would not let me. But I had better have put up with it as it was; for words cannot describe what the alternative has been—*what it is at last!* Murderer! Coward!" cried the dying outlaw, as suddenly his eyes glared at something darkening the doorway; and he ground his teeth, and raised his clenched hand, and fell back again, and shuddered into insensibility.

Mr. Hurley turned his eyes; Dr. Mercer was at his victim's feet, undiscomposed as if in his own library; sallow as twenty years in India could make him, about forty-five years of age in fact, but gray, and about sixty in appearance. The master of a very large fortune professionally accumulated, his business in New South Wales was that of spending it in the enclosure and improvement of a princely domain; his companion in the task, a young lady just half his own age, whom he had "bought for next to nothing," according to the common custom of the East Indian market. Holding out his box to Mr. Hurley, as he fixed his eyes on the outlaw, he said:—

"Ha! he'll not give your police much more trouble, Mr. Hurley. He's got it."

"Nor you, doctor, much more amusement; but if all he says be true, you have made the best of your time," said the magistrate, with a very significant bow.

"Sir!"

"We'll talk about it, Dr. Mercer, in-doors, if you please, before you go. Your business lies *there* (pointing to the form on the planks) now—if I don't mistake."

Dr. Mercer, however, appeared determined to take the matter throughout just as he had commenced. After examining the prisoner's wound, he simply remarked that it was inevitably fatal; "time would only be wasted in doing anything for such a case: the more quietly he takes it, the longer he'll live."

Without condescending to take any further notice of the young magistrate, he walked out of the cell, and was about to re-enter his gig on the outside of the stockade, when the voice of Mr. Hurley, close behind him, arrested the movement.

"Doctor, a word before you go."

The two gentlemen passed round to Mr. Hurley's apartments; but in about five minutes came out again—the doctor, still collected and contemptuous—the young magistrate firm, but flushed. Mr. Hurley stood whilst the doctor got into his gig without speaking; then, as he was about to take the reins from the hand of the groom, said, in a voice of which every syllable could be distinguished at fifty paces distance:—

"I shall ride over to-morrow morning, Dr. Mercer. You will by that time make your election, whether voluntarily to afford me the fullest facility for examining into the treatment of the convicts on your farm, or submit to my forwarding an instant and urgent

recommendation to His Excellency to have the matter thoroughly gone into by a commission of magistrates."

Dr. Mercer drove on with a forced smile upon his features. Mr. Hurley turned towards the cell, with one on his also; but it was one indicative of the possession of far more effective powers of defiance.

"Just serves him right!" exclaimed the corporal to one of the privates who was standing at his hut-door with him, where every syllable Mr. Hurley had uttered could be heard. "He's one of the worst masters in the colony."

"And he's just got into as right hands," responded the private, "as he could, if the whole colony was to be searched through. The cove has often asked me about him, when his men have made such heavy complaints; he'll stick to him, now he's begun, till he's took satisfaction out of him."

Again and again, during the evening, Mr. Hurley visited the prisoner, desirous of ascertaining whether he had any further statements to make, or wishes to express. But the dying man was now too far gone. He had, however, sufficient intelligence to comprehend and appreciate the information that the first letter to his wife was already written and sealed; and sufficient strength to express his gratitude in a few feeble phrases. By midnight all was over. A few further words may be added to sketch the other portion of the results.

True to his promise, next day, well on towards mid-morning, the magistrate set forth on his unpleasant but imperative duty. It appeared, likewise, that it was with determination to give the utmost notoriety to his measures, be they what they might; for he rode with the entire force of mounted police at his heels, and at a remarkably leisurely pace. Dr. Mercer's estate was a considerable distance downwards in the district; and the journey was not performed till late in the afternoon. Then the party, leaving the high road for a much less-beaten bush track, wound on first, for a short distance, through the low-ground forest, and afterwards up on to the top of a line of small mountain; there bringing the clear ground and buildings of the extensive but solitary farm into sight.

From the mountain-top an immense forward tract of country presented one sole monotonous feature: unnumbered small ridges, alternating with as numberless hollows, in regular succession, like the billows and troughs of the sea; the whole so thickly wood-covered that the eye looked down on nothing of surface except the wave-like tops of the trees; only that, off to the left, and almost close under the mountain, nature had slightly varied its gambol, and left unbroken a level, of some two miles or so in diameter, each way. Along the edge of this level tract, nearest to the mountain, flowed the watercourse, that drained a large portion of surface on both its sides; and on its margin again rose, at one side, the farm buildings; whilst on the other extended the clear ground, which the ample wealth of the oc-

cupant of the domain had speedily cut out of the dense woody wilderness.

On approaching the homestead, everything bore witness that money had been lavishly expended in expediting the settler's advances upon the natural state of the locality; the fullest effects had been aimed for in the shortest space of time. Already, about a hundred acres on one side of the watercourse were green with the coming grain; and fences, of first-rate quality, intersected the standing bush in all directions. On the other side of the almost lake-like water-hole, which here marked the course of the now not-running river, a slightly-raised, but very broad-topped, hill teemed with erections, complete or progressing. Of these, the most conspicuous was the cottage mansion. Reared only for temporary inhabitation, it was entirely of wood, verandahed all round, and weather-boarded, and confined to a ground floor; but painting and ornate embellishments, of every available kind, within the bounds of good taste, well-designed fencing, and well laid-out garden ground, and its own ample dimensions, altogether rendered it an object which, met with in such a secluded situation, irresistibly awakened surprise and complacency. The kitchen, and other specially domestic buildings, partially flanked it on both sides, and met in the rear: a couple of servants in livery were to be observed, amongst various others in ordinary clothing. At a respectful distance behind were barn and shearing-shed, cart-houses, stacks, huts, and much more of like order. The garden, the lake-like water, and the fields in front; and behind, the retinue wherewith wealth subordinates the face of nature to its will.

But as the young police magistrate rode forward toward the garden entrance to the dwelling-house, his vigorous moral impulses, unimposed upon by all this display of material power, a far different object began to throw an influence into the scale. The lady, who has been already alluded to, came out into the verandah to welcome him; one resplendent infant sitting on her arm, and an elder clinging to her robe, as he tottered onward by her side. Mr. Hurley instinctively motioned to the troopers to ride round to the huts.

It appeared as if Mrs. Mercer had been made acquainted with the object and spirit of Mr. Hurley's visit, for her sentiments and expressions seemed all carefully adapted to conciliate; and the magistrate forgot his purpose for a few minutes, as he took up the eldest of the little urchins from his mother's side, and carried him in-doors. During the conversation which followed, enough transpired to inform the official visitor that his impressions of Dr. Mercer were neither eccentric nor singular; but to assure him, likewise, that so much of concession and promise of reform were intended to be indirectly conveyed, as would enable him properly to defer the rigorous scrutiny he had intended, till an opportunity had been afforded of testing their sincerity.

During the evening, Dr. Mercer essayed an indirect extenuation of himself. The convict, he observed, who had met his death

in resisting capture, was one of the most depraved and turbulent of characters.

"By-the-bye, sir," said the magistrate, "I have not yet mentioned to you that I knew the man personally for several years, whilst occupying his original position in society. Allowing your statement to contain a correct appreciation of his character, the discipline he has since undergone must have altered him wonderfully for the worse."

This was rather unlooked for information, and the doctor was compelled to shift to some more tenable ground. He seized upon the comparative condition of the free British labourer and the felon. But, though shown that the unmerited sufferings of one class could never be any ground on which to proceed to subject another to useless and even mischievous inflictions, and thus compelled yet again to abandon his position, he still remained unmoved in feeling on the point.

"Will you allow me, Mr. Hurley," said Mrs. Mercer, "to inquire wherein civil and criminal law stand defined from each other? Is criminal law that law which takes cognizance of wrongs wilfully done, and civil law that which has regard to acts which, though wrong in themselves, must yet be supposed to be done without the evil animus?"

"Not exactly. I admit the sarcasm to be merited. But the origin of our legislation, found as it is amidst the darkest ages, is rather to be blamed than present intent."

"Am I not, then, correct in supposing that the whole classification of offences by which British jurisprudence acts is empirical?"

"I cannot deny that it is; the principles you appear to wish to ground the decision on being granted."

"But are they not just principles, Mr. Hurley? Is not the classification of wrong into intentional and unintentional, itself a just one? And can you, by any possibility, found a system that shall work morally on the minds of men on any other classification? Will you allow me to press my scrutiny one point further? Do you not think that crime generally is *over-punished*, and that that has an extremely adverse effect on the reformation of the culprit? Does he not become reckless through it? Does he not still further lose confidence in society and in the availableness of rectitude to secure happiness? Does not that, again, draw more close the bonds of felon fraternity? Are not the avenues of humility and remorse thus closed up, and all the force of association, and partly the force of conscientiousness, enlisted against the discipline?"

"I might express dissent from your views, Mrs. Mercer, in some minor points; but broadly I think with you."

"Well, I have no intention, at all events, of venturing any further, lest I should be laughed at as 'being in advance of the age.' I see Dr. Mercer is strongly inclined to smile at what I have said already."

As the superintendent of the police and his party rode home-

wards next day, he had the satisfaction of hearing from the corporal that the overseer of the farm had been very busy all the previous day, exhibiting to the hands how much superior the prospective arrangements for their treatment would be found than the retrospective. The corporal added, "It wouldn't be amiss for the poor devils on many a farm throughout the country for one of their number to be shot, if there was such a magistrate as you, sir, to look into it."

A sense of gratification arose at the tribute in the breast of him to whom it was paid. But it tarried only for an instant. He recollected with pain and perplexity how his conduct was securing homage from the just and generous far and wide: *the one* alone excepted of whom he most desired it.

It is a remark which will, perhaps, surprise the European reader, that Mr. Hurley must be looked on as an exception amidst his order. Whilst the system of transportation to New South Wales was in its fullest force, the Government of that country, more by far than that of any other of our colonies, was imbued with a military element. With the reasons we have nothing to do; we merely relate facts. The consequences immediately affecting the lower orders were, the selection of justices of the peace to a very large extent from amongst military gentlemen who had become settlers, or were even merely employed on garrison duty at the settlements, and thus the interpretation of the law in a military spirit. But as the lower order generally is that one which in common civil society rebels the most recklessly against control, the collision between it and the law thus interpreted became still more harsh, rash, and desperate:—the superior mingling, but too commonly, with his investigations and judgments the caustic and irritating sneer; the inferior passing into furious defiance. And it was by these means that a vast amount of the benefit to the criminal's morale, which should have resulted from his seclusion in a new country, was prevented; or even after it was commenced, neutralized. Nor was it till the legal profession in Sydney began to attain a well-established existence and vigorous character, that the evil was at all mitigated: then, when some of the judicial offenders had been cast in ruinous damages, the evil began to abate. With so much of explanation of the case, it may possibly be best in the present pages to leave it. There are details, however, which the fictionist might cull from fact, that would interest as deeply as they would profoundly astonish. The design of the explanation at large is merely that of showing that the stand made by the young magistrate was as uncommon and self-denying a line of conduct, as it was beneficial to all legitimate interests within his district.

In tracing out the small section of the felon life of New South Wales that could with propriety be introduced into this work, it was absolutely necessary to confine the delineation to a few characters and incidents. It will, however, be allowable to pass in review in a cursory way, before concluding this chapter, some

general points; as they in a great measure account for the sentiments of the convicts towards the emigrant population.

On many farms it was quite a standing axiom that a prisoner was of no use till he had been twice or thrice flogged: unnatural terror was not sufficiently excited: he did not spring suddenly enough into action at the sound of the overseer's or master's voice. The slightest occasion, therefore, was laid hold of for sending him to court; and it was generally tolerably well known what would be the result.

The wretched victims of this system, whilst they, on the one hand, saw that resistance was hopeless, saw, equally clearly, evasion tempting them on the other. Hence, nineteen-twentieths of the bushranging that took place. That crime, in the case of the characters introduced into this work, has been set in the most favourable light possible for the free class. Generally it arose from the severities of the masters much more than from the depravity of the men.

Some of the histories of bushrangers exhibit, in the precursory stage, a degree of tyrannous severity toward them, only to be paralleled by the atrocity of the crimes to which it conducted. Those crimes were sometimes awful indeed. On one occasion, two of these wretches, being wandering in the interior wilds together, the one shoots and burns the other, whom he supposes to be entertaining a design of delivering him up to the authorities: on another, a single individual tomahawks nearly the whole gang out with him whilst they are asleep: the exact number so destroyed was either six or seven;—and afterwards he puts an end to two of a police party despatched into the bush with him to ascertain the truth of the confession he had meantime made of the former fact. And so on to the extent of a long catalogue.

At some of the penal settlements again, the discipline—if discipline it could be called, which effected exactly the opposite of that it was presumed to be calculated to effect—was such that time after time, year after year, the poor maddened creatures used to commit murders of individuals amongst themselves, *that they might have a spell, and be hung.* A change! a few weeks in Sydney gaol, on gaol food! and death! When such was the alternative they chose, how horrible must that have been from which they fled!

Of course these penal settlements were the final portion of the convict's career; but its preliminary stage was marked by other arrangements besides those already cited, very little inferior in absurdity and malific influence on character. On many farms, ration was so parsimoniously given, and work extorted with such an exorbitant avidity, that no man of an ordinary appetite had anything to eat after Thursday night. There was then Friday and Saturday, till late in the afternoon, to be got over without food. Some struggled through—struggled thus for years—without allowing themselves to be driven into fresh crime: others have been known even to go and learn from the blacks to dig

the wild roots of the wilderness for sustenance: whilst yet others again resorted to theft. But all the while the work must be done.

It amounted to nothing that, when taken to court for refusing or neglecting to work, the wretched culprit said, "I had no food. I was so weak I could hardly stand." The immediate inquiry was, "Was the legal ration served out to you on the Saturday previous?" Yet, than that idea of a legal ration, could any conceivable thing be more absurd? If, indeed, the law could ordain an exact equality of digestive power amongst individuals, such legal scale of supply of material would be defensible. Otherwise, it is a human enactment flung in the face of a Divine law.

The total consequence, meantime, of this crazy system, and of its maintenance by the most harsh and irritating administration of the law embodying it, was that hundreds of the convicts were driven to desperation. After they had been starved and scourged out of their senses on farms, and had become, through the very tyranny exercised upon them, eyesores to master or overseer, they were next transferred, if they failed to take to the bush at once, to the gangs, working in or out of irons on the roads. At these places they were gradually made completely fit for the pandemoniums of the penal settlements.

The overseer's recommendation to his overseership was invariably that he was an overbearing, brutal being, ever ready to appeal to physical torture. And virtually, though not theoretically, he stood invested with judicial powers. He had his constable and a lock-up; and, if displeased, could put any hapless wretch who had offended him into confinement. And the culprits, after being thus kept in confinement, and left to sleep on the bare damp earth all night, were generally very glad to go to work again without having the matter any further decided by appeal to a magistrate.

Unfortunately, that tendency which there is in the human mind to go to extremes, rather than maintain the just and rational medium, led masters but too much into either the course portrayed in this chapter as that taken by Dr. Mercer, or into as careless a non-control of their men. The latter, however, was, as may be imagined, by far the least common.

Of late years, the entire system, and all matters consequently on which it bears, have become much meliorated; so that it is only at our strictly extra-penal settlements that the most objectionable parts of it remain. The treatment of the prison class at large, however, still remains an unresolved and important problem. It will probably be found in the end that the banishment of culprits to new countries is the most beneficial course, both to themselves and the empire at large. It will also be found that the stimulation of the better tendencies by hope is as necessary as the repression of the evil ones by fear; and nothing seems more certain than the impossibility of reconstructing character effectually in a profoundly artificial condition. To isolate a criminal may, indeed, temporarily break up his *habits of evil doing;* but it neither nullifies the *tendency* to evil, nor does it evoke any tendency to

good. It is, in effect, teaching the man to depend more than ever on himself, making him less social; and it seems undeniable that the more a moral agent is taught to live within himself, and the less he finds himself dependent for enjoyment on others, the less must come to be his respect for their rights and happiness.

Nothing can be more undoubted than that, in our primary penal colonies, a correspondency could always be traced between the personal character of the master and the general moral state of the men. Was the master careless and inattentive to his own business? Then were the men ever to be found lax, reckless, and disorderly. Was he tyrannical? Then were the men malicious and insubordinate on their part. Was he of a cool, reasonable character? Then were the men at large steady and willing at work. Of course single exceptions must be expected, especially in such a class. But of the influence, and the character of the influence itself, there can be no doubt. And it deserves serious consideration whether the power of *superior character* upon that below it is not one of the greatest principles in the formation of a system of reformatory discipline.

Should it be hereafter concluded that colonies do present the best field for the exercise of a reformatory discipline upon public criminals, the new settlements need by no means be constituted and conducted on similar principles to the old. Going no farther back into the subject than that point last alluded to—the influence of the character of the persons entrusted with the care of the criminals; surely there never need again be fifty or a hundred men assigned to one single estate, and that, one on which the master is not seen by the six months together: there need be no indiscriminate assignment, to the most reprobate and reckless settlers, of the parties on whom the discipline is required to be brought to bear: there need be no such system of maddening tyranny as that which thirty years ago prevailed at the additional penal gangs.

But what need of these remarks? Since that period, the whole spirit of the world has changed. Such things cannot be again as once were common and beheld without surprise.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Major Jennings' Vindictiveness—Marianna's State—Her counsel with Rachael—Rachael's Philosophy—Perplexity—Short Rations—Discontent of the Hutkeepers—Lieutenant Bracton's Remonstrance—Mr. Hurley's Intervention—Its Effects.

By one of those fortunate accidents which happen so frequently (but only) when matters interesting to persons of consideration are under the hands of persons in authority, the culprit was not forwarded by escort to his place of destination for several days. In the meantime his wages was sent over to him from his employer

by Beck, with a certificate, under Lieutenant Bracton's own hand, of the excellent character, as a servant, which the Welshman had earned during several years in his employ; and a present of five pounds from Mrs. Bracton. The younger ladies found means before his departure to be their own almoner.

The delay, however, was inimical to the subject of it in another particular. His prosecutor, the major, had felt not a little annoyed by being reminded of his recent emergence from rather straitened circumstances, and of the equivocal return he was making for the Welshman's humble courtesies: for John Thomas had not hesitated, when placed in custody, to remind him of both one and the other, just as plainly as he had explained them to the young ladies in his cell; and that annoyance was greatly increased by the evident disapprobation of the lower functionaries of the court and others at the trial. The prisoner had served his term of transportation in the district, his general character was fully appreciated by all the residents, and public opinion of his offence, taking his motive into the account, refused to follow the harsh course of the law. Nor was Major Jennings on any occasion a man whose character and habits attracted the common sympathies. It chanced that he had at this juncture to make one of his journeys to Sydney; and of course the affairs of his part of the colony could not have gone on properly if he had neglected to wait upon his Excellency, and the Colonial Secretary, and the Head Superintendent of Convicts. In connexion with the department of the latter, it chanced, no doubt by one of those opportune accidents before alluded to, that before the Welshman arrived at Hyde Park barracks, Sydney, whither the formal sentence of the court had consigned him, an order met him at the intermediate station of Liverpool, stationing him in a road party employed on the Argyle line, not far from Lupton's inn. This was virtually, though not ostensibly, an increase of punishment.

Meantime, of the Welshman's two persecutors, the black was by far the least malignant. His object had been accomplished, and it was not without some degree of compunction—which even bad men can feel for their victims when their purpose is served—that he handed over to the bullock-driver the money and the certificate of character. Malice was not an active element of Beck's character; his predominant vice was intense greed of gain.

Marianna's hapless journey to the township had resulted in one of those revulsions of feeling which so constantly take place in individuals without anything like a complete conception of the extent and depth of the change by lookers-on: nearest connexions often only ascertain their magnitude by future events.

Marianna's life-dream was at an end. Hitherto her will had swept away every obstacle; but this incident showed her that, on the stage of life, even the beloved and honoured woman must learn to subjugate herself, more than the favoured girl in the mild region of domestic life. Her quick intuitions instantly conned and comprehended the lesson. There was no longer any need

that (to use the rude but apt phrase before quoted) her future husband "should be a police-magistrate." She felt downcast and spiritless. Mr. and Mrs. Bracton fretted over her without being able to blame any one; Katharine and Rachael only thought her ill. Her own mind was still labouring under too much of perplexity and morbid excitement to make any attempt to alleviate the regrets of others.

Sleeplessness, the usual persecutor of active minds in seasons of indisposition, rendered it necessary for Katharine and Rachael alternately to sit constantly with Marianna. A few days only had elapsed, yet she had become pallid and wan-looking; the overflowing, girl-like vivacity of her demeanour was toned down into a staid and womanly seriousness, making her appear even years older than she was. But they who delight to study the secret paths along which human spirits are led to their goal of perfection, had such been there, would have consoled themselves as they observed how faithfully the feminine journey was being taken, and that redundance of determination got rid of which would have endangered Marianna's future happiness.

It was the autumn of the year; one of the snow-white moons of the season and the clime was close upon the full. In that favoured region the earth and the sky are oftentimes so vapourless, that the student may take out his book and read at his ease by the light of the moon, long before she has mounted the full height of her arch. The still radiance of the night penetrated the chamber where Rachael still sat by the pillow of her friend. Katharine, worn, but not wearied, by her solicitous watch, slept the sleep of the innocent. The invalid, in silent anguish, contrasted the present hours with those when she first contemplated the resplendent skies of night at the rough hut far back in the nook. There all was rude in matters of social accommodation; here, everything had become well assimilated to the customary usages of polished life. But, whilst the outward comfort had advanced thus, what ruin (as it seemed) had overtaken that inward peace, which was of far greater moment.

"No one can be about now, Rachael," said Marianna. "Do open the blind and let me see out into the moonlight! Stay! What noise is that?"

"It is only Nep, walking his rounds," replied Rachael, as, after listening an instant, she proceeded to fulfil her friend's request.

"Poor Nep! How he'll miss dear Hurley, Rachael. Mr. Hurley used often to hunt out the key of the store-door, and steal Nep a piece of beef, when he gave him to us first, and we were obliged to chain him to keep him from going back; and after he had once begun, Nep kept him to it."

"And yet," remarked Rachael, referring more particularly to the epithet of regard, "you persist in treating Mr. Hurley in this unkind and ungenerous way."

"Oh, Rachael, I would do anything—would suffer anything,—

rather than treat Mr. Hurley ungenerously: treat him unkindly, I could not."

"But you *are* doing so, my dear: we can all see it, except yourself. And he must feel that it is so."

"Why, you say there is very little, if any, change perceptible in his manner. There can have been very little harm done under such circumstances. No, Rachael, I am satisfied I have made a great mistake: he does not possess those quick and refined feelings I gave him credit for. I speak not of any offence against myself;—though I do think, Rachael, that when we submitted to entreat him by a third party (and, as he must have reflected, a mere vulgarian) to come over and see us before going into court, he might have spared us the mortification of such a direct refusal through such a channel. My allegation—and I make it not in resentment, but in grief—is, that he is sacrificing his duty to the higher part of our nature to the demands of the lower: he is suffering earthly ambition to trample down heavenly charity. He knew as well as we knew that that poor fellow's legal crime arose from the excess of a moral virtue. Do you think that in such a case, Rachael, I would have suffered myself to dispense the punishment? I suppose these convicts are used to this sort of thing, so that it makes not much difference to them: but it makes all the difference to me. Do you think that I could vow to worship that which—if I have any faith at all, or any oath to myself and to heaven—I will ever hold to be wrong and intrinsically base?"

"You are wrong, dearest," said Rachael, "in all points. And the trust which, now more than ever, you repose in me (for I cannot but see it, when you take such pains to show it) obliges me to be faithful, and tell you so. There never can be any baseness in the performance of a duty: the strict administration of the law is the duty Mr. Hurley owes to his office; and this is all that you have to allege against him. Depend upon it, Mr. Hurley felt the exercise of his office as painful to himself as we have felt its consequences unwelcome."

"Surely, then, if his own heart abjured the procedure required by his functions, he ought to lay them down. For recollect, Rachael, that this must be supposed to be no extraordinary case: similar cases must constantly present themselves."

"No doubt," said Rachael, "many such do. But the circumstance of every case being similar would involve no such obligation. The laws can by no means take cognizance of motives except in a very general way: yet there must be laws, and men to administer them. And then tell me, Marianna, as your own good sense shall dictate the instant answer, which is best—that a man should be the administrator of the fearful forces of the law, whose sentiment and intelligence are most wounded when it works erroneously, or one whose sentiment and intelligence sustain no shock at its unjust severity?"

"Let me kiss you, dearest! I thank you for that. It is indeed a great excuse for Mr. Hurley. But do you think he has ever

considered the matter in that light, Rachael? It seems rather far-fetched."

"Many things, Marianna, do appear so when reduced into thought, which, nevertheless, in the form of sentiment are in continual operation in our minds. It has no doubt been Mr. Hurley's feeling from his very boyhood, that, being educated to a just apprehension of the spirit of the laws of his country under men the most learned in them, and cherishing principles of honour, integrity, and benevolence, he was more fitted to occupy such a post as he now holds than some worthless and senseless person, who had no such qualifications. He must have *felt* his title to the position, if he even did not *think* about it: and, in such a case, really to feel the title is equivalent to feeling the duty of asserting it. We hear from your papa how he has habitually controlled Mr. Jennings: are you not sensible that Mr. Hurley was doing great good in that; and that he must have been doing it with considerable pain to himself? Did he never tell you that his chief regret in leaving his post arose from a consideration of the foolish, arbitrary, and oppressive way in which Mr. Jennings is likely to act, whenever he may get the opportunity of sitting alone?"

"No. Did he tell you?"

"Come now, Marianna; pray don't be so foolish: I see what you are thinking. It was since you saw him, during the day or two the Welshman was in the cells, and in connexion with the news of his expected removal, that Mr. Hurley made the observation to me,—and quite casually."

"He is very close, I know, on all matters connected with business. But tell me, Rachael, do you really think that Mr. Hurley holds and exercises his office under a full sense of reasons such as you have suggested?"

"I feel quite sure of it, dearest. Men's thoughts, you know, must necessarily be very different from our thoughts. Our sphere is the family; theirs no more limited than the race, or at all events the nation: they must be influenced by broader and more general considerations. And surely we cannot suppose a young man like Mr. Hurley to be insensible to a sentiment so natural to every good mind under such circumstances."

"Dear Rachael," said Marianna, after a short pause, "you must lie down now. I feel better than I have done since that dreadful fit. I think I can go to sleep."

"Sleep, dearest, whilst I sit by you. It will make me so happy; for it will show me that your heart is once more at ease. Then I can tell Mr. Hurley in the morning, if he comes over, that all is well again."

"No, Rachael—no: mind, I forbid you. I cannot forgive it: he made us of no more account than wantons, in the eyes of all who saw what occurred."

"Nonsense, Marianna! mere accident in itself. As for people having such thoughts—that is, in other words, only that the wrong notion is always more easily got at by the unworthy than the right."

"Well, I cannot help it. I could never submit to be 'no-ed' and 'yes-ed' in any such peremptory manner. Besides, I shall always be afraid of Mr. Hurley henceforth. I had no notion he had any such dogmatic temper——"

"Child! I shall be angry with you directly. You know as well as I do that his refusal was not a dogmatical and indecorous one. You know he said he was sorry, and that it was *the importance* of his business that hindered him. And I told you how frankly he acknowledged that his evasion of seeing you arose from his perfect consciousness of the extent of your power to persuade him, coupled with the danger of its exercise."

"Rachael, you are very eloquent in behalf of Mr. Hurley. Hark! you have wakened Kate—or is the old lady dreaming? Just step across, and listen what it is about. I dare say it's something about Broken Bay."

"Indeed, I shall not listen."

"Well, then, be quiet, and allow me. She has taken that little rustical girl quite under her protection, you know."

"And a better, and a gentler, and a lovelier protectress," said Rachael, "the little rustic could not desire."

"There! I told you so. *Kable! Kable!* But I wonder which it is she means—the sister or the brother? My Israelitess, tell me."

"Ask Kate herself," replied Rachael, "she lies there with her eyes wide open looking across at us."

"Oh, Rachael," said Katharine, "why did you tell sister? I wanted to hear what she would say next."

"So, then, you were practising upon me?" inquired Marianna.

"Of course," said Katharine, "when you as good as invited me to do so. I heard you when at first you said I was dreaming. Found out, Nanny! for the ten-thousandth time: trapped in another of your own little pit-falls. Believe me, Rachael, Mr. Hurley has had an escape."

"Don't be quite sure of that, sister, yet: I must think about it in the morning. I want to go to sleep now."

"We had better say nothing more to her, Rachael," observed Katharine. "If Marianna is left to the operation of her own feelings, they always lead her eventually to that which is most affectionate and becoming; but if you argue with her, there is no end of the casuistry she will go on to raise. Besides, you know, it is such a pity to *drive* a young lady to the water when she has determined not to drink."

The last observation or observations Marianna did not hear, or seem to hear. Rachael continued to sit by her friend till the softness and perfect regularity of the breathing assured her that Marianna had sunk into the peacefulness of a deep sleep: she then retired to the side of Katharine. "Oh, Katharine," she said, as she composed herself for the night, "what a long way off from the light are we born; and what wanderings we make in our attempts to reach it! How we seem to shun the great gate of the temple,

ever standing wide open to invite us; ever emitting for our guidance the joy-song of the elder worshippers! We hear the words all plainly; we know them to be TRUST, HOPE, LOVE. We never utter them in speculation or experiment, but we feel the spirit's passion of PEACE filling, and occupying, and blessing us. And yet in by the great wide gate we will not go, but ever wander round through gloomy winding passages and low, dark portals, where, bewildered and desolate of heart, we cry for guidance, till it seems to us that the ear of Jehovah is shut upon us for ever. Whereas all the while He is reproving us for our wandering, and awing us back to the true way by the majestic rebuke of His silence. How humbling it is, Katharine, that one should possess the full comprehension of this wisdom, and yet perpetually fail in the practice. Marianna and I have often talked of all this; and yet, you see, now when she should use it, she has lost all remembrance of it."

"Impatience only foils us still more," said Katharine; "patience and devout toil must ever be the learner's lot. I am sure Nanny will become quite reconciled to Mr. Hurley in the end, for she knows what is right as well as any one; only just now her pride, which is one of the great elements of her character, is very much wounded. Pride in Mr. Hurley seems a sort of abstraction, which he can resort to or divest himself of, just as suits his judgment: I know no one who would have suited sister better. With plenty of sagacity and abundance of decision, he combines a singular patience: I have often observed it suddenly shame her into a complete revulsion of feeling."

In the course of a few days a communication arrived from headquarters, definitely empowering Mr. Hurley to proceed and take upon himself the authority at his new station. All who had been brought into connexion with him in the course of the fulfilment of his duties at Ghiagong, with the single exception of Major Jennings, regretted his removal; those who most regretted it were such as knew him best. Rachael received the announcement from him with a mingled feeling of pleasure at his advancement in life, and sadness at the thought of no longer enjoying so great an alleviation of the monotony of her home-life as his daily calls had become; and, in the present perplexed condition of affairs, it was felt by the whole family at the Rocky Springs (save the member most seriously concerned) to be most inopportune and undesirable: yet, had the hidden nature of the case been known, it would probably not have been so considered. Katharine, combining with the anxieties of a benevolent heart the modifying surmises of a sound judgment, while she regretted that her sister and Mr. Hurley should become separated under circumstances apparently so adverse to their future meeting, felt a strong conviction that the patient steadfastness of Mr. Hurley's character would stand effectually in the way of any other attachment on his part, and that his absence would be the most effectual means of diminishing her cousin's mortification; which she knew to be the

real, though by no means the acknowledged, cause of her present waywardness.

The indisposition of Marianna had not been allowed to become a matter of general notoriety; but no one acquainted with the family could fail to observe the gloom that now overcast their countenances. Although the disease in Lieutenant Bracton's flocks had now greatly abated, partly by veterinary treatment, it was by no means completely subdued; and the men, prompted by their own perception of the cloud that hung over the inmates of the cottage, and by casual expressions of the overseer, as well as by the nature of the case, entertained a very general opinion that Lieutenant Bracton would follow the example of many other unsuccessful settlers, and, giving up the attempt, *retire* to the mode of life they conceived the most natural to him, that of a half-pay officer.

In such a state of things on an Australian farm—where the convict element of character remains always existent, however modified by circumstances,—an insubordinate, insulting, and even aggressive spirit invariably manifests itself; and, as long as the cause exists, nothing can repress it: harsh measures are sure to aggravate the evil. A reckless hope, a wild prospect of emancipation from present restraint, dazzles the ill-regulated minds, and lures from the habitual track of disciplined obedience, the wayward dispositions of the felon class; and the inferior portion of the imported free population sympathizes and coalesces in the movement.

In addition to this general disturbing cause, there came just now into action on the farm another of a temporary and specific kind. Grain had for some time been very scarce in the vicinity: the dray had been despatched to one of the larger settlements a little lower down the country for a supply of flour; and the new driver, being unused to the bullocks, and they to him, the team had knocked up on the road. After a week on very short allowance, the hands found ration-day again come round, and no supply. These are the occasions that the disaffected eagerly seize upon: the administration of the affairs of the establishment is canvassed in full conclave in the largest hut, where the hutkeepers and any other unoccupied hands have gathered, preparatory to carrying up their ration-bags to the farm-store, when the overseer gives the signal for serving out. If one speaker has to stop short for want of matter, another helps him with some fresh bit of information; and thus, when once the notion is afloat that a proprietor is becoming unsuccessful, it gathers accumulating force, till at length it becomes a powerful means of bringing about the imagined result. The settler, whether prosperous or not, will best regard his own interests by preventing, as much as possible, all general assemblages of the hands, except on occasions of festivity: when all is going on well, the pervading temper of the men is much improved by their being brought together occasionally for seasons of hilarity; but under other circumstances, these general councils should be carefully, though not ostentatiously, prevented.

The Saturday afternoon of the week came, and the hutkeepers from the various stations brought in the bags for the weekly ration for themselves and their shepherds: but the dray had not arrived, though it was expected hourly; the farm hands joined the men from the stations in the main hut, and the council commenced.

"No flour this week, I suppose," growled one of the hutkeepers: who are at once the least hard worked men on a farm, and the most discontented.

"The cove will not keep his Government hands long," remarked the considerate man, who was still a hired yearly servant on the farm, "if he can't find 'em rations. I don't mean to work myself unless some flour comes: I never would when I was a prisoner, and I'm sure I ar'n't going to begin now."

"Ay," rejoined another of the hutkeepers, "and after Mr. Hurley's gone, the cove'll find he can't have it all so much his own way as he's been used to."

"But I'll tell you, lad," responded the considerate man, "Mr. Hurley isn't such a bad fellow, after all 's said and done; he will stick up for a prisoner, or any other poor man, and see that he has fair play."

"Do you think it was fair play," retorted the hutkeeper, who was the same with which John Thomas had been stationed, "to take the Welshman's ticket away from him for going to look after his master's property?"

"He'd no business out of bounds, lad," said the considerate man; "if people will be fools, they must expect to get turned into the fools' mess: for my part, I expected he'd be in for as bad, or worse, some day, ever since I've knowed him."

"You may come up for your rations,—you hutkeepers come first," called Beck, directing his voice into the hut as he passed.

"What's the black going to serve out this afternoon?" inquired one of the incomers of the other hands, as soon as Beck was gone. "What's become of Miss Katharine?"

"She's at home," replied one; "but I heard Biddy say Miss Bracton is ill. Rachael Moses has been here to keep her company this three or four days, but went home yesterday. I wish I'd had the chance of driving her over to the township."

"Why?" asked the hutkeeper.

"Because there was hangings to it, lad. She gave old Tom such a bang-up new Spanish bladed pocket-knife; one of them the old Jew sells for three bob. It's queer what a liking them two's taken to one another."

"Who?"

"Why, the young missis and the Jew's daughter; she hardly ever stirred out of the cottage all the while she stopped. Miss Katharine's got a double watch now she's gone."

"I wish to the lord Harry the black hadn't got to weigh out my rations. I never got good weight from him yet," said one of the convict hands.

"He gives us good weight," said one of Beck's protégés, "as any overseer I was ever under in the country."

"Ay," replied the first speaker; "he docks us prisoners to give it to you free men, because you go and spin him yarns about all that's going on on the farm." To this—as the prisoner who spoke it was a rather weighty man of somewhat *forcible* character—the free man to whom it was addressed, being a little man, did not think it requisite to make any reply, especially as he was aware that, in consequence of a former disagreement, the speaker already "*had it in for him*" whenever a drinking bout should afford opportunity for the said "*it*" becoming a transferable possession.

Not long after this conversation, Lieutenant Bracton received at the cottage a message from the overseer, requesting he would come over to the store, where the rations were being served out, and say what was to be done; for the men said beef was of no use without bread. Mr. Bracton put on his hat and proceeded thither accordingly.

"Your flour is on the road, men," he said, as he drew near to the expectant group; who mostly cast their eyes down as he approached, though some few, putting on an insolent air, stood without moving, full in his way, and stared him in the face. "You know it has never been short, except a couple of times, since we have been here, and then you got the back ration paid up in full when the dray got home. Besides, I shall consider you're disgracing yourselves very much if you take me short now; for I have always ordered your ration-bags to be refilled, without waiting for ration day, whenever you ran short. It wouldn't be manly, men: it wouldn't be English."

This was by far the most energetic and well-conceived remonstrance that Lieutenant Bracton had ever yet addressed to his men; and, though not exactly perfect in its tone, was beginning to produce considerable effect, and create a favourable majority. Beck stood surprised: it was the first time he had ever known Mr. Bracton throw himself into direct and authoritative connexion with the men themselves.

"Well, what do you say?" asked various individuals of the others; "shall we knock along till the dray comes?"

"If you like," replied one; "I think we've got enough by us in our hut to do for a week."

"Why, man," said the first speaker; "we've got very near half a hundredweight to the good. But they're precious bad off always at that station by the road: there's often half-a-dozen travellers stopping of a night; I don't know how they manage as well as they do. I believe they've been out of bread ever since Thursday."

"Well," replied the other, "I'll lend 'em five pounds of flour this week till the dray comes, if you'll do the same."

"Very good."

"Tell the cove, then, we'll manage without any flour till the dray gets back."

"How long will the dray be, sir, before it gets here?" asked the

spokesman of the master; endeavouring to make the arrangement look as much like a favour as possible.

"I expect it every hour," replied Mr. Bracton; "when I found it had not arrived at dinner-time, I sent a man off on horseback to hurry it forward."

At this instant Mr. Hurley came round the end of the hill on horseback; but, seeing Mr. Bracton at the store, and, not being quite at ease under existing circumstances at the cottage, he rode on towards him. This incident was the most unfortunate one that could have happened: the magistrate's arrival at the precise juncture might have excited no particular remark, but his departure from his usual custom of dismounting at the door of the cottage, and the circumstance of his riding forward to the store, produced an impression that his visit had been requested by Mr. Bracton, in contemplation of the precise crisis. As Mr. Hurley advanced, Lieutenant Bracton stepped forward some paces to meet him; the group of malcontents immediately huddled close together by the window, within which Beck stood to perform his duties, and the conversation proceeded as follows.

"He think he's nicked us now," said one of the convicts; "but I'll be hanged if he has, so far as I'm concerned. I'll have my ration, and I know my two shepherds 'll say the same."

"Will you go out without your flour, Ned?" asked another.

"No," replied Ned—a young scion of England's rural democracy, whose habitual title was "Chuckle-head," but whom on this occasion, as he had to be got to take a side, it was necessary to address with some show of politeness; "I don't care nothing about the flour while I've got plenty of beef: but if nobody else gives in, I sha'n't."

"Ned was always a trump," observed Beck, so as just to be heard by the group. He thus hinted his own opinion how they *could* act if they chose; and at the same time drew their attention to his own countenance, on which he took care to exhibit anything rather than symptoms of an inclination to check the spirit of revolt.

Lieutenant Bracton, with the impression on his mind that the matter was settled satisfactorily, began to move on toward the cottage with Mr. Hurley, who turned his horse's head in that direction.

"Are you going to do without the flour, you chaps?" asked Beck, hastily, as he leaned forward in the window.

"No!" was the unanimous reply.

"Well, make haste and run after him, and tell him so." No one, however, seemed inclined to accept the task. "Come," said Beck, "make haste, or it 'll be too late. Here, you Ned, haven't you pluck enough for that?"

In another half minute, Ned was close on Mr. Bracton's heels with his message. "We must have the flour, master."

"What?" exclaimed Mr. Bracton, turning sharply round.

"All of us is agreed as we must have the flour," said Ned, very

peremptorily, sticking to his text, but instinctively putting up his hand to the rim of his straw-hat.

"What's this?" inquired Mr. Hurley, looking at Mr. Bracton in some surprise.

"The dray," said Mr. Bracton, "is beyond its time, and we positively have not a single ten pounds of flour left in the stores or the house. So they've all taken it into their heads to go into open mutiny."

"You are a set of scoundrels," said Mr. Hurley; and he turned his horse's head and rode slowly back to within a few feet of the group, and faced them. "Mr. Bracton, to my knowledge, is the best master in this district, and this is the way you impose upon him. Which of you are prisoners? Here, range off there to the left, you who are:—now; every one of you get what ration it is convenient for the overseer to serve you out; and, within five minutes afterwards, be off this hill, on the way to your stations. The man who fails to obey my order, unless by permission of master or overseer, I'll flog on Monday, between the hours of twelve and two."

The convicts advanced in silence together, and proceeded to hand in their ration-bags to Beck. Once more the police magistrate turned his horse's head toward the cottage; knowing that his power over the various individuals in the group of freemen depended entirely upon the terms of their several agreements with the proprietor.

"I suppose you wouldn't like to flog any of us, would you?" shouted one of these, in a steady, but jeering tone, as he rode away.

"Be content, my good fellow," replied the police magistrate, speaking over his shoulder, without altering the pace of his horse, "not to try *what else* I can do. By-the-bye," he added, sharply throwing his horse round, "are you not the man that ran away from Captain Scobell's some time ago?—I ask you, sir?"

"Yes;" most unwillingly growled the individual who had spoken, after a little delay.

"Well," said Mr. Hurley, "I don't wish to interfere in any affairs between masters and their hired servants. But I'll just tell you this: Captain Scobell made great inquiries after you at the time. I think you were in debt, were you not?"

"Something, I believe."

"Ay, some fifteen pounds or so, that you had overdrawn your wages. No tidings could be got of you at the time. If any had been got, Captain Scobell would have sent you to gaol for breach of your agreement. I have always had my eye upon you since you came on this farm. I thought you were the man. If he finds you now, I very much doubt whether he wont prosecute you still."

CHAPTER XIX.

Parting interview of Mr. Hurley and Marianna—"Released—not rejected."—Mr. Hurley's leave-taking—Grimsby, the Constable, found out.

THE object of Mr. Hurley's present visit was to obtain an interview with Marianna before he proceeded to the head police quarters of the more populous district to which he had been appointed. He had not seen her since the day of the Welshman's trial; but he had heard, with pain, that the effect upon her health and spirits had been serious: yet he felt that he could not honourably and prudently have taken any other course than he had; while Katharine's unabated cordiality, and Rachael's concurrence in the propriety of his conduct, affirmed his own convictions. He, therefore, wished to make his motives clear to Miss Bracton, and then leave her own judgment and better feelings to do the rest.

He found Marianna much better than she had been for some days; but pallid and feeble: she manifested no disposition to avoid a personal interview: for Rachael had not told even Katharine the whole of what occurred that morning; and all, except Rachael and Marianna herself, attributed her illness to over-exertion and disappointment, and sympathy for the unfortunate culprit. Marianna, consequently, met Mr. Hurley with the full consciousness that he was aware of only such portion of her feelings as had been manifested on that particular point.

"I am very happy to see you, Mr. Hurley," said Miss Bracton, desirous to place him at ease; "I was afraid my little fit of fretting over this unlucky protégé of mine and Miss Moses's, would have prevented me from seeing you to bid you good-bye, and express my most devout wishes for your future advancement and happiness."

"I can never desire advancement, Marianna, but for your sake, or happiness in which your happiness is not the greatest part."

"Let us forget the 'Marianna' and the 'John,' *please*, Mr. Hurley, henceforth," said the young lady, pronouncing the word John as if she quite wondered at herself for having ever used it.

"I cannot think that there is just cause for such rigour, Miss Bracton; but I admit that your will alone can give me the right you intimate your wish to withdraw; and I have too high an opinion of your understanding to persecute you with any claim you reject: but I do wish to be not misunderstood."

"Oh, I think there can be no misconception in the case, sir. I see—and I will candidly avow to you that I desire, and will strive to see—my way by the 'light of heaven,' and not by the fatuous fires of earth. And yet, perhaps, in some measure, I may have wronged you, Mr. Hurley; if so, I am very sorry—very sorry indeed. Certainly, when we first became acquainted, I did love power and ambition very much more than I do now: but mine has been no wilful estrangement from you. It rather seems as if in

these solitudes, and influenced not a little by association with dear Rachael, new views of things had presented themselves to my mind. On the other hand (if I may be allowed the remark), *your* entire success in the course *you* have marked out for yourself, appears to depend on harmonizing with the inferior principles on which men conduct the business of the world. You and I could never walk together permanently, for we are not agreed. All I can do is to acknowledge my great, my unfeigned sorrow at having betrayed you into entertaining prospects and plans which it *possibly may* inconvenience you to alter."

"You puzzle me, to a certain extent, Marianna," said Mr. Hurley, speaking rapidly. "Will you allow me to ask you to state in other terms, so that I may make sure of your meaning, what is your proposition?"

"That I must ever act on completely different principles from you, Mr. Hurley."

"I should hope so, Miss Bracton. If I could find in you only what I already find in myself, what should I have to worship (using the remarkable and sound phrase of our Church),—to assimilate myself to by worship? For worship is neither more nor less than the instrument of assimilation. Did it never occur to you, Marianna, that by mutual approaches here, we are to construct some great common trait of character that will unite us as one spirit hereafter?"

"Ah," replied Marianna, endeavouring to conceal her inclination to forget everything, and frankly "make friends" with Mr. Hurley again, "that is very pretty, sir,—very pretty, indeed; only not quite to the point. You suppose that you would assimilate to me; whereas I suppose that you would not, and could not, and, circumstanced as you are, ought not to do so."

"And why 'ought not,' Miss Bracton?"

"Because a regard to your honour would forbid it: even I can see that. You could not hold your office, and act on *my* principles."

"Of course not, Marianna. Neither would it be commendable for a lady to invoke the spirit of a police court into her family. (Forgive me, Miss Bracton: I forgot your desire for the instant.) What I wish to say (and I am sure you will agree to it) is,—that it is an error to confound the requisitions of exactly opposite circumstances: they must be dealt with each in its own way, and rules are not to yield in favour of exceptions."

"Let me ask you this question, Mr. Hurley;—Did the Welshman merit his punishment, or did he merit reward, on the whole?"

"From me, punishment, Miss Bracton; from Mr. Bracton and yourself, reward; that reward I believe you carefully secured him; but it was contrary to the spirit of my sentence from the bench."

"You imply, then, Mr. Hurley, that we ought not to have rewarded him."

"By no means, Marianna. I merely point out the facts,—that

you did your duty, and I, in like manner, did mine: that though the spirit of what you did was contrary to the spirit of what I was bound to do, and I had the power to have prevented the mitigation of the punishment, I did not use it; nay, I even allowed the prisoner full opportunity to receive the reward of his good conduct, as he had received the punishment of his offence. And I think this was securing the harmony of our duties to the utmost. Let me ask,—do you guide yourself by feeling or by duty?"

"By my sense of duty, Mr. Hurley, decidedly."

"Then if I do the same, and we mutually respect each other's position, what can be a more complete harmony of feeling than that? Have your new views, my dear Marianna, carried you to any higher principle of conduct?"

The final inquiry elicited a "No," in which it would be difficult to say whether conviction or astonishment at being convinced preponderated.

"Yet I greatly fear, after all, Miss Bracton, that I have not made a perfectly satisfactory defence of myself," added Mr. Hurley, after a short pause, in a tone of inquiry.

"I do feel convinced, Mr. Hurley; and yet I cannot say that I feel satisfied. I hardly like to make the acknowledgment, because of the annoyance it must give you, and yet in it lies my only defence. *You have terrified me.* I had no notion that you could execute your own will with such a stern contempt—I see you object to the term contempt; I will merely say disregard—of the humble, the almost too humble, petition I was about to make to you. Forgive me, Mr. Hurley, I cannot talk upon the subject any further: I feel excessively ill. I have spoken candidly, and told you all. Let it suffice."

"Shall I call for Katharine?"

"Thank you, no: there is no one within except mamma. I will manage to get to her room by myself. Some of them shall seek papa, and send him in to you."

"No, Marianna, I cannot neglect you, even though you forsake me. Take my arm: yes, I entreat you. Let me lead you as far as I can: and for that half minute, at least, don't wrong me by being 'terrified' at me."

Very shortly afterwards, Mr. Hurley set forward on his way home. The year was advancing into its short, chill days; and the gloomy twilight of a night of clouds promised barely light enough for reaching the township by brisk riding. But he could not put his horse to any pace. The pride and lustre of life seemed gone for ever. Now the wind was still: and now again it rose in gusts, and drove along, and tossed, and scattered the fallen leaves; and then again ceased, and seemed sullenly to leave them where it had recklessly scattered them. Its sound was full of the melancholy voice of autumn—*Departed! Departed!* "Yes," he said; "it is indeed the whole tale of the moralist. Sun, moon, and stars alike, all rise but to set. Flowers blossom but to glory in the maturity of an hour, and then fall into fragments. The ocean must atone

for its fullest flood by its lowest ebb. And our lives are but the last bar of the same song."

It was quite dark by the time Mr. Hurley reached the township. After having given the requisite directions for his journey on the morrow, he proceeded to bid Rachael farewell. The light shone across only through the windows, indicative that the double doors of the store were closed, and that Rachael was alone. And yet the duty of calling on her seemed anything rather than a pleasure.

As Mr. Hurley entered, Rachael at once saw that his visit to Marianna had been unpropitious: his usual alert but serious glance was displaced by a look of suffering and self-constraint; and his face, naturally of a bronze more than ordinarily deep, was haggard and wan. The answers to her inquiries respecting her friend's amendment were comparatively satisfactory; but beyond that topic she could not go, though her heart beat painfully to do so. Mr. Hurley, at length, when he rose to leave, took upon himself the task of opening the subject.

"If I should leave this colony, Rachael, I shall not do so without coming to see *you* once more. Your friend, I suppose, I have taken my leave of *now;* for I could not see her again with other prospects than those I was once so happy in."

"Oh, Mr. Hurley! has she indeed been so unkind? What did she say? Oh, what a wilful girl she is!"

"Her last words, as I left her at the door of Mrs. Bracton's apartment—for, poor girl, she suffered me to prolong the conversation till she nearly fainted—when I put it to her whether I was really rejected, were, 'Not rejected: certainly not. *Released!*' We will not mention it further, Rachael, if you please. As I may not see your father, give my respects, on leaving, to him. Perhaps, in some dull hour, I may seek to cheer myself by writing to you. Good-bye. And fare-thee-well, my kind little sister."

"No, no!" said Rachael, scarcely able to articulate, "you shall not go away from me so, Mr. Hurley. Indeed, you will not," she continued, as she laid her hand against his arm, and directed him across to her father's seat. "That great, lonely building over the way is no place for you to-night."

"I must go and pack for my journey."

"No, no, no! you must sit with me. And don't be downcast. If the sun sets, it is but till the morrow, and the roses of to-day are not the last the tree will bear. I have not had tea yet; and it will be such a gratification to me to think of this evening hereafter, if you will stay and take your tea with me."

"Kind and dear Rachael!"

"You consent, then?"

"I never consented to anything more cheerfully, Rachael. I see you bite that cherry lip: you may well smile. I know I must have a look of anything rather than the *cheerful*, if the outward is any counterpart of that within."

"Come, come; compliments now. This is to me a heart-

breaking hour, Mr. Hurley. My dear Marianna will never approve of any other character as she has done of yours: but it never can be that she will persist. What reasons did she give you?"

"Finally, merely that she was afraid of me: that she had deceived herself as to my true character, and supposed me—somebody. I can't quite make it out. She admitted that I could not properly yield; and yet objected that my being firm terrified her. I feel vexed to a degree that I cannot express: and yet I, somehow, cannot be angry with her. But let us say no more about it."

"Will you excuse me from sitting whilst I get the tea-things ready? Shall you be off so early that we shall not see you again?"

"Yes; before sunrise. I mean to ride about seventy miles to-morrow."

"If you make such stages as that, you will overtake that poor fellow who has been the innocent cause of all this mischief."

"Ha! He and Mr. Jennings together have given my fortunes a strange turn, Rachael."

"Well, do you know, Mr. Hurley, I think with Marianna that their overseer has been the contriver of all the mischief: not intentionally, so far as you and Miss Bracton are involved in it, but of the Welshman's share. The man himself told us that he knew the overseer to have driven his bullock over to where he had to fetch it from; and that you know, notorious as is Thomas's propensity to look after his team, looks very like trying to entrap him. Then again, we were told, that when the Welshman was in trouble before, Mr. Beck was the undoubted immediate agent in bringing it about: that he was known to have paid Grimsby to put him in jail."

"You surprise me," said Mr. Hurley. "If Grimsby was paid to put the Welshman in jail, he must have been paid to pick the quarrel with him on the strength of which he did so. Really there is something very singular about this. Grimsby came to me and wanted to sink that part of the charge, as if he knew there was something in it that would not bear sifting. On the other hand, that overseer of Mr. Bracton's is a fine, clear-head fellow, though a black: he would never be so annoyed by the Welshman's pertinacity as to take such a revenge as this. Either this is all a groundless story, or there is some link wanting to make it hold together and make it worse."

"Oh, I think that this is very likely," said Rachael. "Beck is a very bad man: he came here one day, and wanted my father to pledge himself to enter into some undertaking about Mr. Bracton's farm, in case Mr. Bracton should give it up."

"Well, all this is really very strange. Mr. Bracton told me some time since, in confidence, that he had been informed by the hut keeper that the Welshman was in the habit of denouncing the stock-keeper at Coolarama Creek as the cause of his sheep becoming infected. That stock-keeper is not what he ought to be; and

I certainly have met him and Mr. Bracton's overseer riding together much oftener than any other two men in the district. I must see Grimsby about this."

Mr. Hurley saw that there was a group of circumstances which, if they were connected, as they seemed to be, strongly indicated some nefarious secret. Beck was contemplating stocking a farm with inadequate means, and was hand-and-glove with an habitual cattle-stealer; and he seemed to be the promoter of two attempts to get rid of the very man who would be most dangerous to him.

Immediately Mr. Hurley left the store, he proceeded across to his own apartment, and directed his servant to send Grimsby to him. The general appearance and habits of the constable, though still ill-favoured, were much less disgusting than heretofore. Compulsory abstinence from intoxicants for some months had enabled him to procure respectable clothing: he had the look of more intelligence, and the traits of depravity were, at least, softened down; his person also was clean, and, altogether, he was an improved man.

When Grimsby knocked at the door, he laid his ear close to it to learn, if he could, beforehand, the meaning of this unexpected summons. As was customary, the room was only sufficiently furnished; and, being without a carpet, the sounds within could be readily heard by a listener without. He could hear that, immediately on his knocking, Mr. Hurley, who was writing, suddenly rose, and, stepping across the room, unlocked a box, and, putting his hand into a bag of money, took out some and counted it. It seemed like *eight* that he counted. "That's half-crowns," said the constable: "just a pound! That's for me, or he wouldn't get up and count it in such a hurry, and make me wait till he had it ready. By Dad, he's not a bad fellow, take him all in all. I thought he wouldn't go away without giving me something."

Grimsby waited till the magistrate had relocked his trunk, and walked across and taken his seat, and the harsh rapid scratch of the pen on the paper was again going on. The magistrate quietly went on with his business till the constable knocked again, and had been bidden to come in.

"Oh, it's you, Grimsby, is it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Just wait till I have finished this letter. There, sit down."

"Thank'ee, sir; I can stand, for that matter," said the constable, seating himself as he did so on the chair nearest the door. "Very sorry, sir, you're going to leave us."

"Hem!" said Mr. Hurley, with the peculiar tone of one who unmasks a piece of hypocrisy. "The best of friends must part."

Grimsby had a strong suspicion what Mr. Hurley meant; so he said no more. Mr. Hurley finished his letter and placed it in the envelope. As he was doing so, he said:—

"Your conduct and appearance, Grimsby, have certainly improved very greatly. You have become respectably clothed; and I have no doubt you no longer find it necessary to resort to low

and shameful means of getting money. You find your salary and perquisites sufficient to keep you comfortably."

I had better say I do, thought the constable. If he means the money for me he's sure to give it me.

"Oh! yes, sir," said he; "I feel quite getting up in the world."

"Well, here are a few shillings for you. And if you continue to maintain a course of good conduct for twelve months, and are not dismissed from your present situation for any serious criminality, but should then lose it for some of the less serious irregularities you constables fall into, you may come to me and I will give you another chance."

"Much obliged to you, sir," said the constable. "I'll do all I can. I'm sure, sir, I'm all the better for your advice already."

"Just hold the candle for me to seal this letter."

Grimsby, taking the candlestick in his rough, colourless hand, watched attentively the process; when Mr. Hurley suddenly looked full in his face. "By-the-bye, I want to ask you a question, Grimsby, and I expect a straightforward answer. How much did you get from Mr. Bracton's overseer for taking the Welshman into custody for being drunk? Now, no shuffling: you recollect it very well. You came to me, you know, in a great fluster very early the next morning to try to get out of it. What did he give you?"

"By Dad! sir," said Grimsby, utterly thrown off his guard by the unhesitating supposition of the fact. "He did me out of it."

"I asked you how much?" said the magistrate, closely following up his advantage as he still, with the candle held betwixt them strongly illuminating both faces, kept a hawk-like look fixed upon his victim.

"Four dollars, sir: though I never had but the one he gave me in earnest. I wouldn't have took it, sir, only I was half drunk."

"Well, well; I am not going to call you to account for it now let by-past be by-past. But never do such a thing again—hold the candle still! You know that it is a crime in law, and one of the most serious you could be guilty of."

"I judged as much after I done it, sir," said Grimsby. "But he said it would oblige him so much if I'd do it: especially if I could put the Welshman in for something heavy."

"Ay; the loss of his ticket?"

"Yes, sir. He said he couldn't do with him on the farm: he would not obey orders."

"Well! you see what a scrape you have nearly been led into. And this Beck, it appears, had not, after all, the vagabond honesty to pay you for the risk you ran. Now, take most serious notice of what I say: you keep your eye on him. *Has he any cattle about here? Where does he go to? How often is he with Morgan Brown? Why are those two such 'pals?' What is the nature of their connexion? What is the link between them? Are they going halves in anything?* Do you understand?"

"I'll do it, sir."

"And if you discover anything of importance, don't utter a syllable to any one, either of what you know or suspect, but apply to Mr. Bracton for leave of absence to come to me. You need not stay any longer now. Be cautious and active. Stop. Recollect that if you do this faithfully, as you are bound to do by your oath of office, you do good service in the police, and greatly redeem your character, and shall be recommended for promotion. If you attempt to play false and 'sell' the affair—(I give you fair warning)—look out for yourself for ever afterwards, though it be twenty years."

CHAPTER XX.

Beck's Fresh Move—The Myals in the Plot—The Roadgang's Huts—The Welshman as a Gangsman—His Disclosures to Mr. Hurley.

ALTHOUGH Beck had received so severe a rebuff from the Jew, he wavered only for a short time in his main purpose: every fresh recollection that he had committed himself acted as a quickening impulse. He had no notion that a Jew could be other than mercenary, and he felt that, to a mercenary man, the prospect of securing the large farm orders in perpetuity must be an irresistible temptation to betray to Mr. Bracton what had taken place. Ignorant of the old Hebrew's principle of minding his own affairs, and abstaining from interference in other persons', Beck remained for some weeks after the interview in full expectation of exposure; and, had such taken place, he was determined to deny the accusation, invite his discharge, and, having secured his wages, gather his mob of stolen cattle, and return to the Coal River; whither he supposed he might now go without risk. But all passed quietly by: he observed the gloom that hung upon the countenances of the family, and noticed the increasing tendency to disorganization that manifested itself on the farm; which he himself promoted, by significant but seemingly casual hints that Mr. Bracton would "soon get sick of settling;" and, recollecting how he had committed himself, he felt strongly prompted to finish what he had begun as quickly as possible.

He then began to consider the expedients most available to this end. He was not sufficiently acquainted with the more wild tribes of native blacks in this part of the interior, or yet often enough in connexion with them, to induce them to make a predatory attack on the farm. The adjacent tribes were too civilized, and also too well-disposed towards the kind inmates of the cottage, to perpetrate such an outrage; and being, moreover, liable to be got at afterwards, it would not do to employ them in it: nothing being more certain than that one or other of them would tell who was

their instigator. He saw that, if done at all, it must be by some one of the detachments of the savage tribes that occasionally came over the Murray River, or from the Manaroo side of the Snowy Mountains. To manage the affair thus, he must secure Morgan Brown's assistance: Morgan and himself were by this time accomplices in too many "jobs" for it to be necessary for Martin Beck to maintain any great secresy about his ultimate designs to him; whilst what he did tell was an additional inducement to Morgan Brown to assist him. The prospect of having such head-quarters as the Rocky Springs staggered Morgan for a few minutes: it seemed too good to be likely to become true: but, when Beck explained to him the probabilities of success (as conceived by himself) he readily vowed his exertions for its achievement.

There were two points to be gained. The present proprietor had to be "sickened" of his undertaking; and a fresh proprietor or co-proprietor who would suit, had to be found: the latter of these desiderata was easily gained. Beck, as a native, knew several of the old monied men of the colony, many of the most affluent of whom were once convicts; and Morgan, who was going down the country, might call and sound them.

Morgan's first application was successful. "There's an overseer up the country, Mr. Gates," said he to the man of business, "has asked me to call and inquire whether you would like to know of a capital farm that's likely to have to be sold. He can raise a good bit of money, and he wouldn't mind taking the farm himself, if you'll lend him what he's short, on mortgage. It's a first-rate spot."

"I'll deal with him," said the man of business, "if anybody can. What sort of a fellow is he? Not a fool, I hope? He wont give me a journey to look at what's not worth buying?"

"Oh, no, sir," said Brown, "just the wrongest man in all the world for that. He's very near made a swell of himself by his own hard work, and he isn't thirty yet. He's a native."

"Very well: there's every appearance we can do together. Tell him to let me know directly he's sure the chance is open. There's half a crown for you to drink to our good luck in it."

The remaining point was to sicken Mr. Bracton of his undertaking.

"Didn't I tell you," said Beck, when Brown on his return had reported his success, "that a man could be got? I know the old Sydney blades so well: a thing must be precious hot or precious heavy, if they let it slip through their fingers when there's a chance of making a fair grab at it. Did he say anything about how high he'd go?"

"Not a word: never asked a question; only said he must have something worth his money if he laid it out. Oh, he's not pushed for blunt. I heard say that he had just had a whaler come in with a cargo worth thirty thousand pounds," said Brown; exaggerating even what he had heard, which was probably an exaggeration itself.

"I remember that man," said Beck, "when he used to go about hawking tapes, and all that sort of thing; carrying a bottle of rum in his pocket and selling it in the bush at a dump (1*s.* 3*d.*) a glass, and charging sixpence for an inch of tobacco. But never mind all that now. I want to make out what these black fellows mean. Did they seem inclined to do it now?"

"I couldn't make 'em out myself," said Brown. "They're a regular myal (savage) mob. There's not above half of 'em can speak any English. The rest stand and stare at you like a lot of wild cattle."

"What did you say to 'em?"

"Oh, I told 'em that old man settler cobbon (great) rascal: always flog white man at cobbon gunyah (court-house), at Ghiagong; always shoot black fellow all about the bush everywhere: no good. That black fellows ought to mann (seize) stores: plenty bacca, plenty sugar, plenty tea, plenty flour, sit down there. Suppose that murry make haste when that got it, that sure to get away; and then yan, yan (run), murry fast t'other side Snowy Mountains. That white fellow never catch him."

"Well?"

"They jabbered for ever so long outside; and one of the most naturalized came in at last, as proud as a dog with two tails, to say, 'black-fellow believed that meant to kill old settler, cobbon rascal, suppose too many white fellow not sit down all about gunyah; but baal (not) that stock-keeper pialla (tell) toger (soldier).'"

"Where are they now?"

"Ah, that they know best themselves: for in three minutes afterwards they were all off. I left 'em all sitting at their fires when I went to look how my horse was getting on; for I rode him sixty miles a day for three days running, and I was almost jerran (apprehensive) of him. But he's all right. I should be sorry to lose the old brute now I've had him so long."

"Well, well, but these myals?"

"Why, when I got back they were all off."

"Then, they're for camping somewhere about the Rocky Springs," said Beck. "It was their dogs I heard over at the back of the range as I rode up this creek very near at the mouth. I must be off."

"Not them," said Morgan; "they'd never go off in that manner."

"Do *you* know 'em best, or do *I* that was born and reared among 'em in the country?" asked the black, as he stooped hurriedly under the end of the sheet of bark that drooped over the doorway, flung the rein back over his horse's head, and vaulting into the saddle, spurred at full speed over the range.

Meanwhile, Mr. Hurley had made his journey to the capital with his usual rapidity of movement. His appointment was to a locality in the lower part of the colony, and he might have proceeded to it without going so far downwards as Sydney: but he

had a strong conviction that Brown and the overseer were accomplices in the practice of cattle-stealing, and he was fully aware that in such case Mr. Bracton's herd would no more be spared than others; though he did not suspect to what extent it was being carried. It seemed, therefore, all important to ascertain whether the Welshman knew of anything confirmatory of his suspicions.

Beck had now established another herd similar to that he already possessed in the gullies at the Coal River, but much smaller; in consequence of its recent acquisition, the more circumscribed stock which he had open to his levies, and the greater caution he had had to exercise: the country offering fewer facilities for concealing the cattle. At the Coal River, enormous tracts of the most broken ground and of the Australian brush, often as impervious and untraversable as the jungles of India, repelled alike the curiosity of the settler and the scrutiny of the police: but here there was merely an open bush, which could be crossed in any direction, and the cattle could be concealed only by distance and withdrawal from inquisitive eyes.

Beck's scale of depredation, therefore, was well enough calculated for his position: but that fatality which seems ever to impend over crime seized upon him in his last act of endeavouring to secure himself. The snare in which he had caught the Welshman closed around himself. He had evoked the investigations of a mind accustomed to classify facts and investigate their connexion; and the very congruity and continuity of his own stealthy course furnished to Mr. Hurley the clue to his detection.

Any mental process of importance generally casts out for the time from men's flinty breasts the affairs of the heart. Mr. Hurley rapidly recovered his energy and spirit as he hastened down the country to examine the Welshman. Perhaps he was cheered by the prospect of securing another interview with Marianna, under circumstances which would enable him to prove his solicitude for the interests of her family by unmasking Beck; whilst they would at the same time show her that he was not incapable of retracting his own opinions when good reasons were manifest in favour of hers: for, hitherto, Mr. Hurley had concurred with Mr. Bracton in protesting against the unfavourable opinion which the ladies, and Marianna in particular, had expressed respecting the overseer.

On arriving in Sydney, however, and proceeding to the office of the superintendent of convicts to ascertain which of the town gangs John Thomas had been consigned to, Mr. Hurley was informed of the change that had taken place in the culprit's destination. His annoyance at having to mount his horse in the morning and ride back through the same turnpike gate by which he had ridden into the city the evening before, was increased by recollecting Major Jenkins' contemporary journey; to which he correctly attributed this alteration. Late in the afternoon he reached Lupton's inn, and, giving his horse over to the ostler, walked directly forward to the road-party's huts.

The road-party in question were employed in reconstructing a wooden bridge, over one of the creeks crossing the road, which had been destroyed by the bush fires of the preceding summer. As it was not yet sunset, they were still absent at their work; which was about half a mile beyond their camp. The Welshman was one of a gang employed in getting the timber for the foundations; and, the patch of forest where the fallers were at work being some way off the roadside, Mr. Hurley had had no opportunity of observing, as he passed on the day before, that the Welshman was attached to that gang.

The camp was ranged in an opening at the edge of the bush, forming three sides of a square; the unformed line being that parallel to the road. The huts were long, low, bark-roofed buildings of the rudest sort, with slabs rather thrown than fitted together, and many of them displaced. Along the rails which separated the camp from the road, were hung blankets of all colours, white excepted, and of all sorts save untattered. The huts at the far side were superior to the others, and occupied partly by the overseer, and partly as a store for serving out the rations supplied by the contractor. The store, on other than ration days, served as a tool-house for locking up by night the spades and other implements. This building, though the smallest, being likewise the most secure, was sometimes used as a place of temporary confinement for any refractory member of the gang, till he could be handed over to the police, or taken by the overseer to court. In front of the overseer's hut was a long pole, resting horizontally upon two uprights, on which the overseer's nocturnal comforts were spread, to air them and get rid of the fleas. As the overseer had a hutkeeper allowed him, however, whilst those under his superintendence had to manage for themselves as they best could, the interior of his habitation displayed much more cleanliness and regularity than was elsewhere discernible.

As Mr. Hurley walked up to the hut, the hut-keeper, supposing him to be a common traveller, neither rose from the berth where he sat patching one of the overseer's shirts, nor invited him to sit down. This is one of the hard customs of the place; for no one enters a road-party hut (which is always considered to stand in the land of destitution and hunger) for any other purpose than to light a pipe, obtain a drink of water, or make some indispensable inquiry.

"Have you a man in this gang named John Thomas?" inquired Mr. Hurley.

"Yes, sir," said the hutkeeper; now supposing that a settler, the former or future master of the man in question, addressed him.

"Send for him."

"I have got nobody to send, your honour," replied the hut-keeper, looking astonished and perplexed for an instant, as he next concluded that a magistrate was speaking to him.

"Go yourself," said Mr. Hurley, authoritatively. The man put

down his seamstery an instantly disappeared, without waiting to put on his hat.

In about twenty minutes the Welshman was brought to the camp. Mr. Hurley met the two men at the gate; detaining the Welshman, and allowing the hutkeeper to go out of hearing. As the Welshman stopped when ordered, he took off his hat: not out of respect, but to wipe the sweat from his face and forehead with an old rag; he then put his hat on again, and, giving one short careless look at his superior, stood still and sullen as crag on Plynlymmon. The change to extreme exertion and rigid restraint had already reduced poor John Thomas in flesh considerably, and given his countenance, which was ordinarily rather ruddy, a much paler tint: but his spirit seemed to have become more indomitable than ever. Mr. Hurley surveyed the havoc so soon made by the severe discipline, to which he had been the involuntary instrument of subjecting him, with pain and pity; and his pain deepened and his feelings softened still more by sympathy, as he conceived what Marianna would have felt, had she been there.

"I hope you are not keeping the little money you brought down with you in these huts, Thomas?" said Mr. Hurley, in softened tones.

"No," replied the Welshman, raising his head at the tones of the magistrate's voice, looking him once more in the face, "I have leave my money in Sydney, with a friend of mine, Owen Davis. She know me when I was a boy. She have always tell me to come to her if I was in trouble."

"It is very much to be regretted that you should have committed yourself in the way you did, Thomas. You ought to have known that there is not a sheepholder in the country, whose own flocks are sound, who will fail to prosecute for every offence he can prove under that Act."

"Tam it!" said the Welshman, "I do not care. I 'ood as soon be here as anywhere else till my time is up: I shall be a free man in a little time. Only I want to see Miss Mary and ——." But no other name came forth. It might be Biddy.

"What do you want to see Miss Marianna for?"

"Oh, I *always* want to see Miss Mary. Miss Mary have always been very good to me; and I have hear she was very ill that day after she come over to see me in the cell," he added: submitting to speak in a way that would indicate to Mr. Hurley his anxiety to hear how Miss Bracton was now.

"Miss Bracton is better; but still unwell," said Mr. Hurley.

"Tam that black fellow! If I had her in the bush by herself, I 'ood make her know what a rascal she is. I only wish I catch her some day after I get a free man. I go to gaol for twelve-months for her as sure as my name John Thomas, for Miss Mary's sake."

"Ah!" said Mr. Hurley, "it's quite bad enough with you as it is; don't do what will make it worse. But why do you cherish such an inveterate hatred to your overseer? What has he ever done

you? He never brought you to court; and you were almost your own master on the farm; it always seemed to me that you used to do almost whatever you chose. You know it was Major Jennings who prosecuted you."

"It was not Major Jennings that drive my bullock ever so far away, and make me go after her," said the Welshman.

"*Drove* your bullock! Did not the bullock stray of itself?"

"No. Another of our men tell me she see the black fellow drive her; else I 'ood not know where to go and fetch her back. What had she to do to drive the beast off her run? She can stray bad enough of herself, and always did: I have walked a hundred miles a week after that beast. She is a good beast to pull; I did not mind a little trouble to keep her myself. But the black fellow has no business to go and put her ever so far way. What business has she to meddle with my cattle? She cannot keep her own."

"Has Mr. Beck, then, any cattle of his own?"

"She! She have no cattle of her own. She say, she have got some at the Coal River; but I do not believe it."

"But you said something about cattle of his own—he couldn't keep them, you said."

"That is the herd I mean belonging to the farm. I have see a whole lot of the mistress's and Miss Mary's cattle for ever so long off the run;—to the other side of Coolarama Creek."

"Miss Bracton has no cattle of her own."

"Yes, she have; and very good cattle too: some of the best young cattle on the run."

"You must mistake. If Miss Bracton had had any cattle branded for herself, she would certainly have shown them to me."

"I tell you she have: I have seen them myself. One of them is the white calf of the white poley cow that is name Snowball; what she have by her side when the master buy the herd first;—and another is Rose's second calf;—and another is a black and white calf: I do not know what cow it belong to, but I see the black fellow brand it myself."

"What makes you think they were branded for Miss Bracton?"

"Because I see Miss Mary's brand."

"What brand was that?"

"Oh, I know my letters very well, though I cannot write," said the Welshman, supposing Mr. Hurley was bamboozling him.

"Why don't you answer my question, sir?" said Mr. Hurley, in a tone of stern impatience.

"I do not know what question," replied the Welshman, succumbing: but never imagining Mr. Hurley could want to know what initials constituted the brand of a person whose name he knew so well.

"I have asked you how the cattle were branded that you call Miss Bracton's?"

"MB," said the Welshman, "inside a circle: or else that was

"Everybody thinks she will have to go and live on her half-pay, and sell the farm out and out."

The gang came straggling down the road in groups, with their tools on their shoulders: no further point for inquiry suggested itself to Mr. Hurley; and giving the Welshman a final assurance that he would endeavour, in his private capacity, to befriend him as soon as possible, he dismissed him and took his way back towards Lupton's. Before he had arrived at the neat little inn' he had concluded that fuller information respecting Martin Beck's communication to the old Hebrew was most desirable. If there should prove to be any mistake in the information about the cattle—which he perfectly comprehended the bearing of, in connexion with Beck's own initials—or if the cattle themselves could not be found and brought to examination, there was yet a serious case in connexion with Mr. Bracton's private interests. And he felt that Beck's own words might vastly more be depended upon for bringing the fact clearly out than the current gossip of the shepherds. As the case began to bear so grave an aspect, even as a matter of police, he resolved to risk the delay of a few days in proceeding to his new station in order to investigate it. On the morrow, consequently, he again faced his horse up the country.

CHAPTER XXI.

Mary Kable's Letter to Katharine—Beck's incitement of the Myals—Senility of the old Hebrew—his Caution—the Alarm.

WHILST the events just related were taking place at the Morrumbidgee and on the road to the capital, Reuben Kable was proceeding from Broken Bay to Manaroo, with another, though much smaller, mob of his cattle, which he had secured out of the mountains. In conformity with his promise to Willoughby he contemplated diverging slightly from his usual track, at a few miles on the interior side of the settlement of Bong-Bong, and making his way to Manaroo through a pass of the Dividing Range near the Snowy Mountains, thus get the opportunity of yarding his cattle for a night at the Rocky Springs. By making a short stage on that day, so as to be in early, he expected to have time enough for conversing with Lieutenant Bracton, and offering him any advice that he might be able to afford. The state of the flocks was already known to him, through the correspondence of Mary and Katharine; but at that time the ravages of the disease were of but too common occurrence, and Reuben Kable, supposing Mr. Bracton to possess an experienced and able overseer, did not think his counsel would be needed.

He had set forward, however, charged with a letter to Katharine: for Mary Kable let no opportunity pass by without writing.

This letter contained much that artful people would have called sly hints, but which more generous hearts and enlightened minds would have perceived to be no more than the precognitions of innocence uttered in the spirit of the continual wish, "Oh, that Katharine lived with us! How much richer in power to delight would every scene become!—the broad water and the far-off hills beyond; the tangled bush behind, with its myriad meshes of shadow spread upon the ground upon a sunny summer day! Oh, that Katharine were there! that she might teach the many things she knew, and those winning ways which Mary, in the wild bush, feared she had not been able to find out for herself. And more than all besides, oh, that Katharine were there! for Reuben would love her, and be so happy whenever he came home and saw her." Then, again, she asked, "whether Mr. Bracton had heard anything of Willoughby yet: whether any ship had come into port, and reported having spoken his vessel since she had been out? She found she was perfectly right about the name of Willoughby's ship. It was the *Harponier*, as she had called it on its captain's own authority; and not, as Miss Marianna Bracton had written at the foot of Katharine's last letter, the *Blunderabout Whaler*, and she hoped Miss Marianna would not be so unkind any more as to think she could make such a fool of her. It was really very wrong: she was sure Miss Marianna would be conscious of it herself if she would only think for an instant." Finally, "They would be sure to make her brother stay at the Rocky Springs one day at least. The cattle would be nearly knocked-up by the time they got there; and if their stockman would tell him where there was some good feed, he would be sure to give the cattle a day's spell. And then Katharine could tell her in her next letter what she thought of him." But in the postscript peeped out the self-helpfulness of the bush girl unmistakeably—"Be sure to send me the fancy knitting. I have told Reuben he *must* wait for it, if it takes *two* days to get ready." We thoughtlessly consider the actual the great basis of our visions: but moreoftentimes that which at first arises in merest vision becomes the basis of the future actual. The dreamy abstractions of this year will be the concrete fact of next; and often unwittingly, even to ourselves, it is our chief labour to make them so.

On the same evening, and at the very hour when the black spurred hastily over the range from Morgan Brown's hut, Reuben Kable was camping his cattle and lighting his fires at the mouth of a rocky hollow, where they could not escape without passing him within length of his last stage to the Rocky Springs. He had found them so unmanageable on the former occasion, though a sprinkling of tame cattle had been mixed with them to obviate it, that he now had another native youth of lower rank with him, who was also mounted.

About the same time, also, Mr. Hurley stabled his horse within about twenty miles of Lieutenant Bracton's farm. He had made a very easy stage, walking his horse the whole distance he had

ridden; and on dismounting he had the animal well groomed and foddered, that he might be in the best condition on the morrow. His intention was to reach Moses's stores during the forenoon, and, having obtained a precise account of Beck's overture, then to take with him a party of the mounted police, and avoiding the farm, proceed to the stockman's hut and seize Morgan Brown: which, as Brown was not free, he could do without any preparatory step of law. And he had no doubt that the stockman, on finding himself thus suddenly in custody, would accept safety for himself by giving the fullest information against his comrade.

Beck's sudden dash over the range from Brown's hut, meantime, was prompted by a double motive. The stockman was well enough acquainted with the ordinary habits of the blacks: but Beck, who had known them from his infancy, and was familiar with the dialects of the tribes around, possessed the most ample knowledge of them, and he knew that this sudden incommunicativeness indicated the very intention which Morgan supposed they had abandoned. Beck, however reckless in matters of ordinary honesty, felt shocked at the anticipation of bloodshed: moreover, he instantly conceived that the excess of so violent an outrage would defeat the very design he had in hand, or at all events peril its success. He had, therefore, galloped headlong back to the Rocky Springs for the purpose of restraining the outrage within due bounds, going over everything that was in his way, without once tightening his rein more than was necessary to hold his horse up on such a rough road. And every time the animal stumbled, or made a bad leap, and delayed him for an instant, bitterly did he curse the stupidity of his coadjutor.

The aborigines had reached the farm before him: from the point of the hill he saw the first clear spiral lines of smoke ascending from the fires they were kindling at their camp. The spot they had selected was a little platform of dry ground just over the opposite point—the very spot, in short, from which Reuben had first pointed out the farm to Willoughby. A little light arose from the fires, and dully tinged the foliage above with a lurid ruddiness. Evening had set in: the farm hands were in their huts,—the inmates of the cottage were already at their early tea, and everything was still.

He took the saddle and bridle off his horse, and carried them into his hut, the door of which was open. The fire blazed freely; five or six blacks sat couched before it, and in the sides of the chimney; and one of them who, by an effort, could speak English intelligibly, but with a most barbarous accent, observed immediately—"You murry late come back to-night, Mr. Beck, I believe." And then after a pause he added, apparently at the suggestion of another who spoke in their own tongue, "You always walk about boos (bush) so late?"

"No; not always," answered Beck.

"I believe you look out cattle?"

"No;" said Beck, "baal (not) me stockman: overseer me."

"I make a light (I know): Morgan Brown been pialla (tell) me."

Here another interposed to explain the meaning that the first had failed in expressing. "You every day walk about boos to make a light (find) cattle."

"Yes! yes!" said Beck, "to-morrow I make a light more bullock. To-day I make a light good many bullock. To-morrow make a light murry tousand (a great many more)."

"You yan along a yerriman (shall you go off on your horse) murry early to-morrow?"

"Baal," said Beck, "I believe I take ole man master along o' me when I yan. And baal master yan (go) till that patter (eat) breakfast. By-and-bye close up dinner-time."

Here their exclamations and fierce abrupt dialogue amongst themselves in their own tongue—many words and even fragments of sentences of which Beck understood—enabled him to understand that they were congratulating themselves upon the opportunity which would be afforded them by Mr. Bracton and himself being out of the way. It had been his own plan, formed as he rode home, to prevent the murder (which Brown's information gave him reason to apprehend) by getting Mr. Bracton to accompany him on some pretext to one of the sheep-stations; and as their undertaking to murder Mr. Bracton, according to Brown's account, was founded entirely on his being a "cobbon rascal," and "shooting black fellow all about the bush," he thought that to get him out of the way would be sufficient. He entertained no fear of an attack upon the females of the farm. But Beck forgot one thing—and that under the circumstances was an all-important one: he forgot that there was a large keg of rum in the store.

When he had clearly ascertained that the savages really contemplated an attack, he set himself to turn it to the best possible account, by giving them such information as, he considered, would assist them in making a successful escape, and leading them to do as much damage as possible. All the while, however, his listeners, unconscious of his familiarity with their language, and of his knowledge of their intentions just derived from Morgan Brown, conceived him to be making all the observations he made in sheer innocence, and laughed heartily amongst themselves at the idea.

"Black fellow always budgery (good) fellow," said Beck. "That sit down here long?"

"Baal, baal," said some. "I don't know," said others. "Yes, yes!" said they all together, at last thinking it better to appear all in one mind.

"Whenever black fellow yan (travel) this way," said Beck, "that come to my hut, I always give him plenty patter (food)."

"Ay, ay?" said they.

"Yes, I believe so."

"Give it now." "Murry hungry me." "You give it this time," said one and another.

"Very well," said Beck. "You put on cobbon pot, belonging to tea."

This order was obeyed with alacrity of course. The round iron pot used for boiling meat, greasy as it was, was speedily slung over the fire, with as many quarts of water in it as there were to be participants of the beverage.

"I believe you murry budgery (very good) fellow," observed one of them, when everything was seen to be going on with Beck's approval in *bonâ fide* preparation. "You belonging to black fellow."

"I say," said one of the most proficient—for there were various grades of lingual proficiency amongst them, even to some who knew not a word of any language save their own—"Where you come from, Misser Beck? Baal you Englishman?"*

"Baal Englishman, me," said Beck. "Baal I like Englishman. That too much take away black fellow's land. That too much, hunt away kangaroo, 'possum, fish. That jumbuc (sheep) too much drink up all bardo (water). Black fellow me. Belongin' to 'nother country: but just the same as this black fellow."

"You see," said one of them, "that pot a-bilin."

Beck took down his tea-bag, and throwing in such a handful as excited universal applause, both in their own language and in English, went on in furtherance of his purpose.

"Which way yo yan (travel)? Toomut? Goodradigbie? Majury-gong? Gundaroo? Pialago? Jerrabombarra? Nickleagle?

"Baal," they all cried, in shrill deprecatory chorus; for he had named a semicircle of stations in the exactly opposite quarter to that they belonged to. But whilst they declared whither they were not going, recollecting themselves, they abstained from acknowledging whither they were about to go. It was of no consequence: Beck knew very well where they belonged to, and had purposely feigned ignorance: he had merely taken the question as introductory of the suggestion he had to make.

"I believe some day, black fellow man (seize and run away with) jumbuc (sheep) belonging to Mr. Bracton, when that murry hungry. That murry gourri jumbuc (very fat sheep) sit down t'other side Warraghi Bill cattle station."

This was one of Mr. Bracton's young wether flocks, that had been removed in time, and had escaped the malady.

"Baal white fellow catch him, I believe," continued Beck. "That too much, close up mountains. Before shepherd and hut-keeper yan (travel) into farm, black fellow too far away."

"Tea ready, now!" cried one of them, as he took off the plate that had been placed on the pot to keep in the steam. "Sugar, sugar!"

This demand was also presently and prodigally complied with. Beck's object was, of course, to insinuate himself into their confidence. By that he at once obtained an opportunity of directing

* The language of the aborigines varies most remarkably in different parts. But there is a sort of slang, in which communication is held between them and the white people, common to all parts of the colony. It is spoken just as given above.

their designs, and of impressing them with the conviction that he, at all events, would not be very zealous in following them up.

"Wikki, wikki, wikki!" (bread) shouted the whole assemblage.

Beck handed them the greater part of a large damper he had ready baked. "Why not pialla 'bullock, bullock, bullock,' too?" he said, jocularly.

"You got some bullock?" said some of them.

"Yes."

"Well, give it, then: give it. Black fellow your friend, yo know. Binghi (brother) you, belonging to black fellow."

Beck handed them the tin dish with the chief part of a boiled leg of mutton in it, and very little more was said for the next five minutes.

"How many black fellow sit down along a camp?" said Beck, when they began to be disengaged.

"That many," said one, after some consultation had taken place, as he displayed extended the fingers and thumbs of both hands, and then closing them, displayed them both a second time in a similar manner, and last of all exhibiting thus a single hand: this signified twenty-five. But another corrected him with the last number, signifying that it was only twenty-three. And still a further emendation was added verbally to the effect that that included themselves now present.

"Bacca, bacca, bacca! quawh!

"Baal I smoke," said Beck.

"No good you," said the savage who had made the demand. And in a couple of minutes afterwards they all jumped up and began to gather, preparatory to departing, tomahawk, and boomarang, and nullah-nullah from the floor and chimney, where they had laid them out of their hands.

"Well, good-night," said one. "You my binghi," said another, laying his hand familiarly on Beck's breast, as he passed. "Suppose I meet you in boos," said a third, "baal I kill you. You my friend." "Misser Beck your name?" asked a fourth, "Very goot man, you, Mr. Beck. I remember you 'nother time." And with similar expressions, all had at length fairly vacated the hut. Beck stood at the door and watched them as far forward in the direction of their camp as the darkness of the night permitted. The aborigines never cross a hill if they can help it, but sweep round its skirt: thus they had not to rise between Beck and the fires, as they approached the camp. There one of the low, wild, native chants was going on;—

"Wooramah, wooramah jah,
Wondaghi, wondaghi jah;
Jah, jah;
Wondaghi, wooramah jah."

Suddenly it ceased, interrupted abruptly: a single voice uttered a loud and rapid exclamation, and there was silence for an instant; then the distinct and measured cadences of single voices, speaking

consecutively and with great deliberation in their own tongue, told that the spies had arrived at the camp, and that the council about to-morrow's proceedings was taking place.

But whilst Beck was thus, as he thought, wrapping his net around his victim, an unseen hand, in still greater silence, with still more vigilance, was folding it back upon himself. Soon after noon next day the ex-police magistrate rode back into the township. To avoid meeting with any casual bushman at the stores, who might leave the news of his unexpected re-arrival at various huts, Mr. Hurley kept the outer bank of the river round to the back of the court-house, and then kept the court-house as much as possible between himself and the township, as he rode towards his late quarters. Arrived, he immediately despatched the lock-up keeper for Mr. Moses, with directions to intimate that it was to be a visit of secresy; and in a short time the old man was seen hastily but feebly making his way across the green.

Of late the aged Hebrew had become very decrepit: indeed it was evident at times that the weakness of second childhood allowed play to emotions and passions that the moral sense of his vigorous manhood had held in habitual conscientious control. Oftentimes he sat down beside his child on the sofa, and leaned his grey head over on her shoulder for a long time, till she thought he slept; when, if compelled to disturb him by arising, there were the traces of imbecility upon his face: sometimes on these occasions he was even peevish towards her, however reasonable and necessary the interruption. Still, in general he retained all his knowledge, particularly in matters of business; and used it as shrewdly as heretofore. Much still remained uncorroded of the iron heart within that had sustained him whilst forcing his way from the marshes of penury to the sunny-hill top of wealth: but it might easily be seen that he was not much longer for this world.

The fire had been kindled in the court-house on Mr. Hurley's arrival, and the logs were blazing cheerfully and warmly by the time the old man arrived. Mr. Hurley placed the most convenient chair for him in the warmest corner, but delayed for a few minutes to proceed with his business. When, at length, the old Hebrew had recovered himself tolerably, he said,—

"I have a favour to ask of you, Mr. Moses; and I mean to make good my claim by the most candid statement of my reasons. I am most solicitous to know—in fact, it is almost indispensable that I should know—exactly what overture Martin Beck, Mr. Bracton's overseer, made to you respecting Mr. Bracton's farm."

"Vat you mean?" asked the Jew; fully aware meantime to what the inquiry had reference.

"The man I have named," replied Mr. Hurley, "has, I am given to understand, made some overtures, or proposals, or suppositions about Mr. Bracton's farm, and——"

"You are gifen to understand! Who gif you to understand anything of de sort? Haf I?"

"Mr. Moses," rejoined Mr. Hurley, sensible of the oversight, "the excellence of Miss Moses's character and her dutifulness to you are such, that I am sure it is quite unnecessary for me to utter a single syllable in excuse of any word she may have dropped inadvertently in the guilelessness of a young heart."

"No! no need vatever," said the old man. "Rashael is a very goot shild. But you should not catechise any voman apout the pusiness of her own house."

"Allow me, Mr. Moses," said Mr. Hurley, with his habitual self-control, "to withdraw your attention from the lesser point to the greater. With the integrity of purpose that I discern in you, I cannot believe you would allow your neighbour to be made the victim of a most abominable plot, by the servant whom he has treated almost as if he were one of his own family."

"Vell!" said the Jew.

"I have reason to believe that this Beck is wantonly destroying Mr. Bracton's property, with some nefarious view or other, that as yet I cannot get sight off."

"Vell, what can I do for Mishter Practon!"

"You can enable him to preserve his property."

"Never! Hash not Mishter Practon got hish own eyes. If he tink hish property ish in danger, vhy does he not make it shafe?"

"True, sir," said the young gentleman; "but you seem to forget that there is a public justice which ought not to be lost sight of."

"Very vell," said the Jew, "I see vat you vant now."

"And you are unwilling to promote the course of justice and assist in the defeat of the villain?"

"I vill tell you thish ash von of Mishter Practon's friend. Mr. Peck ish a rashcal. I never tell von man vot anoter man shay to me in a vay of pusiness. But I tell you vot I tink myshelf. I tink Mishter Practon ish a very goot man. I tink Mr. Peck ish a rashcal."

"Then you decline, Mr. Moses," said the magistrate, making a last effort to get at his point, "to give me the information I am in need of to stop the career of this rascal?"

"I haf no information vat belong to you at all. Vat any man shay to me in my shtore, ish my own: it belongs to my pusiness. If I was to be a shpy in my own shtore, I should soon lose my custom. It is very wrong—very wrong," he added, as he rose and took up his stick and hat to go, "to catechise a voman that ish only a shild, apout her father's pusiness."

At this instant the lock-up keeper and another man ran past the window talking loudly and hurriedly: the voices entered the outer room, and immediately afterwards an equally loud and hurried knocking was heard at the door of the sitting-room.

"You're wanted, sir," said the lock-up keeper. "Here's one of Mr. Bracton's shepherds come in to say that those devils of blacks are robbing the stores at the Rocky Springs, and have got all the ladies shut up in the cottage."

"Mr. Hurley almost flew to the soldiers' huts, shouting "To horse, to horse, corporal! All the troopers you can muster! Saddle! Never mind changing your jackets. Be alive! Your horses and your arms! Never mind anything else."

"Only one man beside myself in the township, sir," said the corporal, in the most unperturbed tone of military reply. But five minutes had not elapsed before those two, headed by Mr. Hurley, were goring the sides of their heavy horses through the bush far out of sight of the township.

CHAPTER XXII.

Attack of the Myals on the Cottage — The Dogs — Terror of the Inmates — Depredation of the Savages—Succour at hand—Reuben Kable's Dispersion of the Blacks—The Ringleader shot—Retreat of the Myals—The Flock in danger.

THE aborigines allowed the morning to pass on hour after hour without making their appearance at the cottage or the huts, occupying themselves with sharpening the points of their boomarangs, and gumming fresh jags on where there were any displaced from their spears, more, perhaps, out of impatience and habit than from any expectation of having to use them. Most of them sat cross-legged about their fires, but a few of the younger and more restless were going to and fro between the spots where they had slept to the hip of the hill. At length the ochres were produced, and they set to disfigure their denuded and swarthy limbs and their faces with wavy red lines. About eleven o'clock, a couple, who were not yet besmeared with the war paint, came down from the scrub on the top of the point, and reported that "Overseer yan alonga yerriman (on horse-back), and massa—cobbon white fellow!—yan alonga 'nother yerriman. Only gin sit down," (only the women were to be seen about.)

Beck rose that morning without having slept. It was a bolder step than any he had ever yet taken. At times, doubts and tremors came over him; but greed of gain had become the master passion of his soul, and stubbornly resisted the attacks of conscience. And by-and-bye he and Mr. Bracton set out.

The inmates of the cottage were quietly pursuing their usual morning avocations, when, suddenly, Marianna, who was carrying a can of skimmed milk to Nep and the old bull-dog, was startled by terrific screams from Biddy, and the next instant the girl and a huge black fellow, looking like a harlequin-demon, rolled, struggling, over the side of the descent into the dairy. The quick, sullen soughs of the barbarian's wrath, for a moment mingled with the shrill screams of the girl; then, but without uttering a sound, Marianna clasped Biddy round the waist, and almost succeeded

in wrenching her from the coil of the savage; and the next instant Nep had fastened on his back, and was tearing fiercely at the muscles of his neck. With a yell of agony the black shook himself free, sprang upon the level ground, and retreated with long, nimble bounds backward. The uncouth gabbling of many voices, mixed with the deep gurrh-rrh-rrh of the bull-dog, as he stood facing the main body of savages in the direction of the hill point, was heard; then followed the hum and whirr of a spear; and with loud, sharp yells of anguish, significant almost as human tones, the Newfoundland dog sprang through the still open door, snapping into halves a spear that had gone right through him, and cowered down beside Marianna in the farther corner, whither she had retreated along with Biddy. Presently down came the bull-dog with a sudden rush, cowering so as almost to crawl along the earth as he moved, and a dozen spears followed one another, fast and close as drops of a shower, on to the very spot where he had stood. Poor Nep moaned, and whined piteously, then looked up and wagged his tail, and brightened in the eye, and made an effort to rise, but fell with the first plunge, and lay panting, his tongue lolling out, the blood welling out further and fuller from his underside every instant.

Again the wild jabber of the blacks was heard, as if in triumph, and from the store there came the sound of an axe, or some other heavy weapon, breaking in the door; whilst fifteen or twenty feet off, in front of the dairy, four or five of the dark Myals glided into sight, most of them balancing their boomarangs for a throw at the bull-dog: but the acute animal was too knowing for them, and no sooner saw the first armed hand come in sight than he made a push to the back of the door, whence, with his eye just leering round, and his head quivering with rage, he kept up his deep gurrh-rrh-rrh of defiance and menace. The barbarians yelled their threats at the faithful animal, but they could not throw with any chance of success; nor did they dare attempt to enter whilst he kept his post: they knew that the first who attempted to pass would be so maimed as to be unable to travel, if not mortally torn. At length the store door slammed down on to the floor within, and, at the noise, the party who were besieging the dairy hastened off to share in the plunder.

In the meantime, Mrs. Bracton and Katharine were safe, though confined within the cottage. Katharine had observed the first advance of the line, into which on such occasions these aborigines have a custom of throwing themselves. The grotesque hideousness of their decoration, the pompous parade of themselves and their arms, the atrocious wantonness of the air of their war song, and the diabolical concert in which they seemed to be acting, filled her with terror; and she had shut both back and front doors, and locked them in such haste as to forget both Marianna and Biddy. Mrs. Bracton, on coming out of the parlour into the passage, was the first to bethink herself of her sick child: but the savages had now surrounded the house, and, finding the door

fastened, had commenced breaking their way through one of the front windows. Forgetting even Marianna in the sinking Katharine, Mrs. Bracton drew her niece into the back room, and locked the door; and, as the breaking glass rattled on the floor of the adjacent parlour, she closed the shutters of the single window of the room they were in, and barred them. But no sooner was temporary security attained, than all her fears came crowding about her, and she sank down upon the floor beside her niece, who knelt with her face buried in her hands on a chair.

The infuriated brutes made good their entrance, and traversed the open apartments; and, amidst their exclamations of astonishment, the ladies, if they could have distinguished so much, might have heard the noises of their mischief. One swept the crockery down by whole shelves, uttering his quaint humours between whiles; another, when he had contemplated himself in a pier-glass till he was weary, drove his nullah-nullah through it. Several times the door of the room in which they were was assailed with heavy surges: but it was new, and the work of a good workman, and no impression was made; it was, therefore, abandoned for a time. As soon as the news spread that the assailants of the stores had got in, and that there was a keg of rum being shared, the savages in the cottage joined them.

Meanwhile the helpless females shivered, and moaned, and wept with terror and anguish in their weak places of refuge. Each minute pressed on them like an intolerable eternity. They thought of father, brother, lover, as the fierce mirth of the savages waxed into maddest excess: their own despair began to feel like incipient madness too. And now Marianna heard four or five of the fiend-like horde approaching in headstrong dispute: it seemed as if one or more were resolute to perpetrate some diabolical outrage, while others were dissuading them. As they drew near she could understand very well what they said, for the savages have a great fashion when half intoxicated, of trying, in a most pedantic manner to sustain a conversation in English.

"Me patter him, Miaminghi. Then I pialla budgery Englishman (talk good English). Ole King Bondi been pialla (tell) me like-a-that."

"You murry stupid fellow, I tell you; you baal pialla English that way."*

"Baal I care. I patter, Miaminghi. Come: d——n it. Don't you yan away. Give-us-a-hand."

"I sha'n't. You a cobbon fool," retorted Miaminghi.

The trembling Marianna recognised the general threat of cannibalism, but did not comprehend its more specific meaning. Still weak from her illness, chilled to the vitals with the cold of the underground dairy, and heart-sick with dismay at the horrible death that impended over her, she listened in the numbness of

* The trial of an aborigine for the murder of a white person, under the impression that by eating the victim's tongue he would be enabled to talk English, is on the records of the criminal jurisprudence of the colony.

horror, as the savage broke away the sod-roof with his tomahawk. His drunken companions had returned to the store, where all the tin drinking vessels that could be gathered in the huts were filled with rum, and in as many black fellows' hands. But over her head the dig of the tomahawk went on, till it was heard plainly sounding on the planks of the inner roof. Nep lay in the middle of the floor, with limbs that moved not, and dull glaring eye which saw not. Even the grim bull-dog seemed cowed, and conscious that all was lost, for he eyed the corner of the roof whence the noise came, and snuffed restlessly, and seemed half inclined to run away.

Meantime the whole party of savages had returned to the cottage. On leaving it they had let themselves out by the back door, that being nearest to the store: for they manifest a remarkable sense of local relation; and they again entered and walked in and out that way. The closed window and the door that had before defied them were now again assailed; and the nullah-nullahs went to work upon the glass and shutter. Mrs. Bracton and her niece sprang up from the spot where they had sank down, by the window, and, couched in the furthest corner, clung to each other shuddering. But it was now nearly at an end.

Five minutes before this, as Reuben and his countryman were leisurely walking the cattle within about three miles of the farm by the road, Charlie pointed out the young magistrate, and two mounted soldiers nearing from behind at full speed.

"I wonder what's up, Reuben. I'll be hanged if the lobsters haven't got their shells off. There's something afoot that's not easy."

"They know their own know best, Charlie," said his countryman, as, after a short, careless gaze, he took his hand off his horses crupper, and threw himself square again in his saddle.

Nothing further passed between them for the instant. The Australians uniformly take pains to exhibit a contemptuous dislike of the British military. But suddenly Mr. Hurley reined up at their very heels, his horse and himself almost breathless.

"Hollo! young fellow," said Charlie, "don't ride into the cattle, without you want to be driven the rest of the way with them." Reuben Kable, who saw that the new comer was a gentleman, though acting unaccountably, merely rode on without remark, moving his horse a little away.

"In the Queen's name I require your assistance, sir," cried Mr. Hurley.

"I believe so," responded Charlie; "by-and-bye. Me first; next time you, mate."

Reuben took very little notice, beyond one of his half audible laughs, followed by a shout to one of his dogs not to go 'possum-hunting before his day's work was done. The soldiers were by this time come up, and with difficulty held in their excited horses, flecked with foam.

"You appear to be a gentleman, sir," said Mr. Hurley, turning to Reuben Kable. "Will you prove yourself one, when I inform you that within three miles of this spot there is a family of three ladies in the hands of the blacks?"

Reuben stared for an instant at the speaker. "Whom do you mean?" he said; "the Bractons?"

"Yes, sir—the Bractons: if the Bractons you please just now to call them."

"Can your horses stick to bush leaps for a couple of miles?" asked Reuben Kable, addressing the whole party.

"Not very well, at their speed, for that distance," answered the corporal.

"Stick to the road, then. Here, Charlie; never mind the cattle. Follow me, and dig your spur in till the mare drops: only keep up," said the Australian. And putting his horse into a canter, he swept round the flank of the drove, followed by his countryman: and then away they went, at hurricane-speed, for the gap.

The soldiers looked amazed. "He's right," said Mr. Hurley; "there is a track through the bush: we should outride them on fair ground, but they'll outride us that way. On—on, my lads; on!" And away again went the police party at full stretch for the point of the mountain.

Reuben turned his head for an instant, before plunging into the thicker bush of the gap, to observe how the mare was behaving. "Easy, easy, Charlie, for the next half mile."

"Here, let me come first, and then you can go as easy as you like," cried the fiery youth, with the eager desire to get the savages in sight; and, sitting his horse easily, he gave Reuben and his heavier animal as much as they could do to keep up to him. Through the crown of the gap, and down the log-strewn swamp, he kept the lead till he came suddenly upon the now almost burnt-out fires of the camp. Here the riders reined in for an instant. Again the lad was turning his horse's head, as the din of the half-drunk barbarians arose, and pointed out their direction and propinquity.

"Stop, stop!" exclaimed Reuben. "Can it be?" and jumping off his horse, he picked up from the ground a brass-plate, of a half-moon shape, such as the settlers give to favourite leading blacks as a distinguishing badge, to be worn slung from the neck by a chain. On it was engraved, "Bondi, King of the Snowy Mountains."

"Why it's our own blacks, Charlie. Here's old Bondi's plate."

"Hark!" exclaimed his countryman; "there's the nullah-nullahs crashing in the windows. Come on."

But no sooner had the youth reached the hip of the hill than he reined in his horse as suddenly as he had just before eagerly spurred her. "My word, Reuben," he exclaimed, "this will never do. There's very near thirty of 'em."

"I tell you," said Reuben, "they're some of our own blacks, or

else that plate wouldn't be there. Come on, man; we shall have that gipsy-looking Englishman and his soldiers there before us."

As Reuben spurred across to the other point, his anxiety for the family, now backed by wrath at the treachery of the tribe of savages who, pretending amity with the whites at Manaroo, had crossed to where they were not known, and committed this violence; he could plainly distinguish several whom he knew; others there were—the more irreclaimable portion of the tribe—whom he did not know. But he spurred into the very midst of the group at the back of the cottage. "Those I know I'll settle with afterwards," he thought, as he threw himself headlong off his horse, and, springing forward, seized three who were busy in the act of devastation, trying to wrench the stubborn shutter off its hinges with the small ends of their weapons and with their tomahawks. For a quarter of a minute there was the mad struggle of the three savages thus surprised, with this unknown white man; and then the inextricable mass, moving its multitude of limbs in confused battle, rolled over on to the earth. But it separated not till Charlie—who had given the first he had encountered the peculiar "throw" of the white man by the side-long sweep of his foot against the instep, and the straightforward force of his fist at the same instant in the face—seized his nullah-nullah and stunned every one of their heads but his friend's.

As Reuben rose, and his face was seen by the astonished circle, the cry of "Massa! Cobbon Massa!" that had begun, and would in another instant have been followed by a shower of spears, under the supposition that Mr. Bracton was returned, gave way to a general exclamation of "Misser Kable!" "Rubin!" "Budgery white fellow!"—the latter in the tone of cunning deprecation. But Reuben was by no means the right sort of man to hope to deprecate under the circumstances. Charlie had ceased his aggressions because, as he looked round, no further resistance seemed to be offered. But the elder Australian was not so easily satisfied; he seized his stockwhip, and coolly swinging the heavy thong behind him, with a spring and a bend of his body, brought back the hide-lash full on the stomach of old Bondi, which it gashed as if cut by a razor. "Murry budgery that, I believe," exclaimed Reuben. "King Bondi wear that along-a-plate. Then white fellow know him again. Ho! Miaminghi, too!" he continued, as he drew back to get about twelve feet distance between them; and Miaminghi got an under cut that seemed to have half severed his jaw from his head. A third time, facing suddenly round to those behind, he took his aim and struck his mark. "Murry sick you, last time you make-a-light my station, Tallboy! Budgery doctor, stockwhip!"

"Oh! Misser Kable, Rubin!—what for you like-a-that?" yelled the black, as he sprang in his agony high up from the ground; and, when he saw the arm making its measured sweep back for another blow, he bounded away for the mountain. But the favour was not meant for him; it fell in quite another d:

rection. And again and again, before they could determine whether to fly or to wait till they had deprecated the young man's future wrath, did that tremendous weapon of punishment (when wielded by an adept of much strength of arm) cut its way into their swarthy skins, agonizing as a jet of molten lead.

Mr. Hurley and the soldiers meantime had galloped up. At the sound of his voice, and already assured by the overawing tones in which she heard her own language rising above the jabber of the savages, Mrs. Bracton, assisted by Katharine, undid the fastenings of the shutter. "Oh, Mr. Hurley, where is Marianna?" exclaimed both ladies. "My child! my child!" cried the mother frantically.

At this instant the report of a single carbine was heard. The ruthless cannibal at the dairy had broken his way through the roof, forcing aside the top slabs sufficiently to admit of his dragging his victim out. The bull-dog had prevented him from going in by the door, but in his drunkenness he had forgotten that the animal was still inside: no sooner, however, did he thrust himself forward to snatch at his terrified victim, who still shrank back out of his reach, than the dog dashed at him and caught him by the hand. The police had by this time reached the house, and, hearing the howls of the savage, the corporal galloped to the spot: at first he felt inclined to laugh, and leave him to the custody of the dog; but loud cries of distress in women's voices coming from within, he rode round to the door. Leaning down over his horse's shoulder, he saw Miss Bracton and Biddy, in the bewilderment of their terror, holding the dog by the collar, in overpowering horror at the dismal yells of anguish extorted from the barbarian; upon which the corporal, raising himself, tossed up his carbine, and sent a bullet through the black's head. The report brought Mr. Hurley to the spot, and the corporal hurried away to tell Mrs. Bracton that her daughter was safe, and would soon be with her. But it was not till some minutes had elapsed, and the presence of the mother herself had reassured her child, that Marianna recovered sufficient energy to walk, with Mrs. Bracton's and Mr. Hurley's support, to the house.

The few out-and-out Myals that belonged to the party had been the first to make off: they no sooner understood from the more civilized portion (who were also by far the largest number) who Reuben was and where he had a station, than they knew they must expect no further help from them. So that by the time that the ladies were all again in safety, these fiercest of the savages were far away up the flat: the others followed them by twos and threes.

But it was not till they had gone several miles at full speed, that either one or the other checked their headlong flight. As the first who fled made off on the further side of the creek and along the base of the opposite hills, they had caught sight of the approaching troopers, always the objects of their greatest dread. Then followed the shot, assuring them that at least one of their number would

be absent from the camp that night: and finally, as they gazed back from a distance, they could see their comrades following at a speed that proved that no truce had been struck.

As the darkness, however, set in, and no tokens of a pursuit appeared, the foremost paused and the hindmost came up. The open ground nevertheless was not to be trusted to on such an occasion; and their camp for the night was pitched in a deep hollow, at the back of several ranges.

The fiercest of the savage horde unluckily had escaped without a scratch: the severity of the retaliation had fallen, contrary to Reuben's first impulse and intention, on those who most frequented his station. And now these Myals, furious with the rum, bethought themselves of the other part of the project, that of seizing the sheep.

In vain old Bondi, intimidated and trembling at the future wrath of the young Australian, endeavoured to pacify them: although nominally king, he had virtually very little control over them; for after all he was merely the white man's creation of kingship. His own tribe, or rather branch of the main tribe, furnished on this occasion merely the milder elements of the barbarian force.

The evening council terminated just as it had begun: Bondi and Miaminghi and Tallboy, and in short the whole of the "tame blacks," as they are called, opposing the proposal of the "wild" ones to drive off the flock of fat wethers, to which Beck had so basely directed their attention: the wild ones as peremptory to do so; and positive that by making an early start next morning and a rapid march, they could carry off the flock into the mountains before dark, and place at least a good horse's day's journey betwixt themselves and a pursuing party from the farm; and utterly careless, living usually away from the whites themselves, about any reprisals that might be made upon the rest.

Off they went, therefore, very soon after sunrise, for the station —every man with his spears in one hand and his nullah-nullah in the other, and his boomarangs either divided between both hands or stuck in his belt, where also was lodged the light but too available tomahawk: as usual in such cases throwing themselves into one long single file, each man well apart from him before and him behind; rolling along across plain and hill with varying pace, as the ground varied, but mostly at a rate which a European would call half a walk and half a run.

Old Bondi and his partisans still kept with the whole body; nor did there seem any particular choice of places in it by them, in consequence of the difference of opinion. Either the strength of their opposition wavered, and the temptation of the "gourri jumbucs" was too great; or they thought there was a possibility that, by not yet abandoning their protest, they might succeed in preventing the scheme of plunder.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Mr. Hurley and Reuben Kable—Suspicious Circumstances—Mr. Bracton's Return—Beck recognised by Reuben—Beck's Flight.

With an almost angry feeling of annoyance, Mr. Hurley, as he accompanied Marianna in, had observed the person who had so unceremoniously spoken of his friends as "the Bractons," kneeling beside the pale and agitated Katharine; soothing her with the unrestrained and cheerful familiarity of one well known; looking her fixedly in the face, and unresistingly holding her hand.

A short time afterwards Katharine entered the room, where Marianna was receiving all the assiduities of parental care and her lover's unabated tenderness; whereupon Mr. Hurley, with a glance of something like distaste towards her, went out, and looked round for the individual who he now bethought himself had been fortunate in coming first to the rescue of "the Bractons;" and he repeated the term half aloud with a curled lip.

Reuben stood tightening his horse's girths, and consulting with Charlie what it would be best to do next. "Will you allow me, sir," said Mr. Hurley, sarcastically, "to ask whom I have the honour of addressing?"

The Australian turned at the inquiry. It was evidently meant to be a piece of polished impertinence.

"Undoubtedly, sir," replied the Australian, with the same affectation of politeness; adding, with considerable decision in his tone and manner, "And will you allow me to ask you in return, if this is the way you Englishmen take care of your ladies? Why, you might lie abed all day, and do better than this. I can't see a single man about the farm."

"That, sir, is the proprietor's business," returned Mr. Hurley, haughtily, "not mine. My share in the business is both accidental and gratuitous. I have been for several years the police magistrate of this district, but am now in actual appointment elsewhere."

"Oh, then, I suppose your name is Hurley, sir?"

"It is, sir."

"I regret my hasty remark, Mr. Hurley, such being the case. Of course, you feel too deeply interested in this family to be capable of any negligence of them; though really it is very wrong for females to be left so unprotected in this part of the country. My name is Kable, of Broken Bay."

"Pardon me, Mr. Kable. I assure you I had not the most distant idea whom I had the *pleasure* of addressing. On sudden emergencies, your countrymen are apt to cut courtesy of phrase very short, you know; and this makes a peculiar impression on our English ear. How opportune your arrival! I know of no one whom I would so gladly see here at this moment."

"It's all over here, Mr. Hurley," said Reuben. "The ladies might now be safely left, so far as those blacks are concerned: they'll not come back. What was that shot a little while ago?"

"The corporal had to shoot one of them, in rescuing Miss Bracton. Are you at your journey's end for the day, Mr. Kable? or do you go back to gather your cattle? My reason for asking is, that I suspect Mr. Bracton's overseer—a black, who, I believe, is a native of the colony—of being implicated with an adjacent stockman in some most serious offences. The overseer is free: but the stockman is not. I want to arrest the stockman this very afternoon, if I can: under the conviction that he will offer to give evidence against his accomplice."

"I'll stay here, sir," said Reuben Kable, "But, believe me, there is no necessity for it; though it may be desirable to reassure the ladies. My mate can gather the cattle: they are too tired to be troublesome. But my mate's off somewhere. I wonder where he can be!" and, putting his hand to his mouth, the Australian uttered the well-known "Koo-eh!" holding the first syllable with a high, piercing tone.

"He's coming," continued the Australian, as he heard the answering signal from the foot of the hill. "Why, where have you been, Charlie?"

"Just seeing those three fellows I nullah-nullahed on their way home."

"I hope you gave it 'em."

"My word, lad," said Charlie, laughing all over his face, "they were so stupid when they set off that they kept running sideways every now and then: but before they got to the bottom of the hill, they were bouncing along like three kangaroos."

"Fetch the cattle, there's a good lad. I'll have the yard open, ready. You may let them feed up: there's plenty of time. Don't come through the gap: follow the road round. You saw whereabouts it was."

"I must leave you now," said Mr. Hurley. "Everything outside the house and in, I see, is torn to pieces. But we had better leave it uncared for till Mr. Bracton's return, and merely attend to the ladies. I greatly regret that *I* cannot stop." And a strong emphasis involuntary affixed itself to the personal pronoun.

"Depend upon me, for the ladies' safety, Mr. Hurley," said Reuben, smiling, and as involuntarily speaking in a consolatory tone.

Once more Mr. Hurley mounted; and rode hastily away for Coolarama Creek, followed by the two troopers.

Reuben walked too and fro about the hill on his solitary watch. The skirt of the robe of departing day still lingered, a single crimson fold, upon the western sky. Everything was deathlike and still, save that now and then the harsh-voiced bird that sounds the signal of the rising and setting sun in Australian solitudes, uttered his long, hoarse bray, laughter-like and wild. The wind blew cold, sad, and subdued. Even from the dwelling-place itself

nothing was heard but the occasional movement of a piece of furniture, or the footfall of the servant girl, as she moved along the passage floors with the peculiar step of woman when in the neighbourhood of a sick chamber.

At length, Reuben turned towards the door: just within it stood Katharine. "Miss Katharine," said he, advancing, "you are forgetting that you English ladies are hothouse plants. The night blows very chill."

"I have come out to do what some of us ought to have done before—to ask you to come in. But you will forgive us poor feeble beings on such a dreadful day."

"I should be forgetting the thoughts of my whole life, Katharine, if ——"

"True:—Oh, what do we not owe you! Mr. Hurley told mamma that you rode away through the gap, leaving all your cattle in the bush, the instant you heard of our danger; and wouldn't even delay by coming round the road with the soldiers. But Mr. Hurley had not the slightest notion who you are."

"I have informed him, Katharine."

"And mamma, also, was so confused, that she had no idea till I told her, on going in."

"But now I may look upon myself as received as one of your oldest acquaintances. When do you expect Mr. Bracton?"

"Every minute."

"How is Mrs. Bracton? and how is your sister? She appeared to be very ill, as she passed in."

"Mamma seems to have forgotten her own shock in anxiety for Marianna: *she* is ill indeed. And now, do come in. I have laid a tray for you in the least furnished room, because it is the least disordered. And you say, you will excuse us to-day?"

"Let me only take you in from the cold, and I shall be satisfied anywhere, and with anything. And now I think of it, I have an immense letter from Polly, for her dear Katharine. Nay, nay; she said so, indeed—always says so."

The Australian made a slight and hasty meal, and returned to his post. Katharine betook herself to the perusal of the packet; and oftentimes, during the few minutes it occupied to run it over, did she pause to listen to the firm and steady tramp of the heavy boot on the gravelly ground without: the sense of protection came in its very sound.

Several of the hands had by this time returned, and were wandering over the scene of destruction with astonishment and indignation. Each wondered why the others had not been on the ground that day. But each had the same tale to tell:—*He had been sent elsewhere.* By whom? Each had the same answer to give:—*By the overseer.* The men expressed no suspicion; but they evidently all thought it was remarkable. And Reuben, who mingled with them, and listened to their various tales, thought so too. Some of the hutkeepers and shepherds came in for various little icles required at their stations. Beck, accompanied by Mr.

Bracton, had been with every one of them; in each case it was only some matter of trifling consequence for which Beck seemed to have taken the master round. This seemed stranger still; inasmuch as Mr. Bracton had never been known to accompany his overseer through the whole of the stations in one day before.

At length, two horses were heard making their way, at the slow walking pace at which Mr. Bracton usually rode, up the stony hill-side; and dimly through the now settled darkness of the evening the two horsemen were visible. With surprise and pleasure, Mr. Bracton recognised the tall person and distinct voice of his visitor, as Reuben came forward and greeted him. Beck passed on, but, listening, heard the enunciation he expected.

"Your family, I am happy to tell you, sir," said Reuben, "are all in perfect safety: but the blacks have been making themselves welcome, in your absence, to some of your property; and I need not tell you, that they destroy a great deal more than they steal in these inroads."

The heavy rider hastily dismounted, and with a hurried gait, sought the interior of his cottage; whilst the Australian, incited by curiosity, walked on to the hut of the overseer. The black had handed his horse to one of the men to undress, and was occupied in stirring together the red charcoal of the wood he had covered up with ashes before going out, preparatory to making his fire. Reuben Kable, after looking in at his hut, returned to the cottage.

Biddy had cleared and set in order one of the sitting rooms, so at the same time dissipating her share of the dismay that the day's alarms had excited, and Katharine was arranging the table for the evening meal. Reuben sat down and contemplated her in silence, till he felt half inclined to go out, re-saddle his horse, and pursue the blacks to their camp.

Mr. Bracton at length joined his visitor, with a saddened aspect. Even in the midst of the excitement and disorder of the juncture, Reuben could discern the source of this misfortune. Messages passed to and fro between the lieutenant and his overseer: he superintended nothing personally. One walk of survey round the buildings had sufficed him: and everything in the way of reparation, and for the purpose of restoring order, was left to the choice and conduct of the overseer. Reuben deeply regretted that he had so long deferred fulfilling his promise to his friend: but he felt that to offer any general suggestions to Mr. Bracton at such a period would be equally unfeeling and impertinent.

When he referred to the information he had acquired from Mr. Hurley, about the overseer, he found that it was both new and surprising to his host: indeed, so completely had Beck's tact in the management of the farm deluded Mr. Bracton, that he manifested the most decided incredulity.

Still, prompted by curiosity, Reuben once more took his way to the hut of the overseer. The door stood open, and the fire blazed strong with the cold of the night. Beck himself had apparently

only just gone out, and was not likely to be long away, for his meal remained half finished upon the table, and his hat lay upon the berth. The Australian entered and stood with his back to the fire. In the course of a couple of minutes the black returned, and paused an instant on the threshold as he observed "the native," as Mr. Kable's countryman, who had quartered himself at the big hut, had proclaimed him to be; then advancing with a "Good evening," he prepared to seat himself and go on with his meal.

"Have you given orders to have that black fellow buried?" inquired the Australian.

"No," replied Beck, surlily, after an instant's pause; demurring at the interference, but at a loss how to resent and check it.

"Then you ought to have done so," said his white countryman.

"I certainly have seen you somewhere before," Reuben added, after an instant's thought, as he surveyed Beck.

"I have never seen *you*," said the black, steadying his voice, and repressing his stutter.

"You are a native of the colony, are you not?"

"Yes," replied the black, beginning to stutter again.

"And your father and mother live on Cook's river?"

"Yes," said Beck, becoming still more confused, and pausing from his meal.

"And you were working, several years ago, in the brushes between the Blue Gum Flat at the head of Brisbane Water and Bungaree's Norah?"

"Ay! you seem to know all about it," said the Black.

"And you have a large herd of cattle running wild in the gullies about there?"

"Ay, ay!" exclaimed the black. "Who told you so?"

"The warrant that's out against you these several years back, told me so."

"You're a liar!" shouted the black, starting up. "There's no warrant out against me:—there never was."

"Ha!" exclaimed his white countryman, in the same tone of searching inquisition; "you are not proving it now! However, I didn't ask you to criminate yourself: I am no policeman or magistrate. Every one to the business he's paid for. But I tell you this frankly,—so far as Mr. Bracton is concerned, you shall carry on your deception no longer. What I have heard this afternoon determines me upon that point. If you had reformed, when you had to leave your cattle behind, and cut and run, (for I heard about it all at the time, though I did not recollect your name, or imagine you had become overseer here,) I would certainly have held my tongue and given you a chance: but I have heard of you already up here as being in Co. with Morgan Brown; and Morgan Brown's character is all over Manaroo Plains this long while back. I recollect you, now I see you, as well as possible."

Beck made no reply, and Reuben Kable, after waiting to ascertain whether he had any to make, left the hut and walked briskly toward the cottage.

The black instantly saw that he must act promptly and with decision. Knowing that Mr. Bracton was now the presiding magistrate in the district, Beck concluded that, if informed by Mr. Kable that a warrant was positively extant against him, he would very probably, direct his instant arrest. Reuben, however, knowing nothing of the other particulars of Beck's villany which Mr. Hurley had traced out; and aware how common an offence that of cattle-stealing was amongst the lower and even some of the higher of his countrymen; making allowance, also, for the temptation of first appropriating an unowned beast, perhaps altogether forest-bred, and then going on from that to worse and worse depredations, felt inclined not to push the matter to an extreme with his fellow-countryman. His determination was, first to persuade Mr. Bracton to discharge Beck, if possible, and when he was gone off, to explain more fully his character.

It cannot be denied that the infusion of so much of military character and agency into our civil courts in Australia, produces amongst the native race, universally, a most untoward feeling towards the common course of the law. In this feeling Reuben Kable participated, to as full an extent as his cultivated intelligence and high moral sense allowed; and his conversation with Mr. Bracton during the evening was in accordance with this feeling. He spoke of the overseer; heard Mr. Bracton's personal commendation of him; listened to the statement of the ill-favour he stood in with the ladies at large; and contributed just so much to their verdict as he conceived necessary to prepare the way for a more urgent remonstrance on the morrow, in case Mr. Hurley's attempt to procure evidence from Brown should fail. From the necessity of frequently associating with them, he knew the character and mental habits of that class of men far better than Mr. Hurley, and he had no expectation that the attempt to intimidate Brown would be immediately successful. He considered it probable that Brown would remain silent till some overt act was brought to light, before he consented to act the part and dare the future odium of an approver; and he thought it likely that Beck would be aware of this, and (if sensible that he was safe on other grounds) would continue to bid defiance to Mr. Hurley's scrutiny. After the explicit intimation he had given to Beck that he neither asked him to convict himself nor intended to assist in convicting him, he did not expect that Beck would determine on a sudden flight. Such, however, immediately on Reuben Kable's leaving the hut, became the determination of the black: the hint he had received of his connexion with Morgan having become detected, scared him into a resolve which he would not have formed merely on the strength of his countryman's recognition and threat; for he felt satisfied that from him he should get even more than fair play. But the fear of falling into the hands of the police on a charge which might detain him in custody for several weeks, together with the likelihood that, during that time, the circulation of police news amongst the several benches might lead to his identification as the individual named in the

warrant of the Coal River Court, was not to be got over. He summoned the man who had turned out his horse, inquired whereabouts he had left it, and dismissed him; then, seizing his saddle and bridle, and a few other articles of immediate and important utility, he hurried down to the flat and caught the animal, bridled and saddled him, and made his way to the security of solitude and darkness.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Mr. Hurley check-mated—Insubordination on the farm—"The seven stockmen"—The Australians in pursuit—Beck's childhood—The blacks overtaken and dispersed—Recovery of the flock.

Mr. Hurley and the two mounted policemen reached the vicinity of Coolarama Creek stock station just as it was becoming dark. A cautious reconnoissance enabled them to conclude that no one except the hutkeeper was within. Mr. Hurley and the private then took their station at some distance up one of the ranges, on the Creek side below the hut, whilst the corporal posted himself in like manner higher up the Creek. It was certain that Brown would return by one or other of these roads, they being the only beaten tracks to the spot.

An hour or so afterwards, when it had become quite dark, a horseman was heard steadily making his way up the track on the lower side of the hut. Waiting till he was just abreast of them, Mr. Hurley and the trooper rode down, the one behind him, the other in front; and suddenly the black and the magistrate, to their mutual surprise, found themselves face to face.

"Stand!" said Mr. Hurley.

"Well, what now!" inquired Beck.

"Oh! you are the overseer at the Rocky Springs. Where are you going this way?"

"To see Brown the stockman about some of the herd that have strayed."

"You may go on."

"Not forward, though," said Beck. "Flat-catching is out of season, Mr. Hurley. It's of no use for me to be looking for that man up at his hut, when you're looking for him here." And the Black laughed, in a stern and taunting tone, so different from anything he had ever heard from him before, that Mr. Hurley involuntarily drew back. Beck was carrying his fowling-piece with the muzzle resting on the toe of his boot, his long pea-jacket covering the butt, which he held under his right arm, ready for instant use. His penetration staggered Mr. Hurley completely, who wished he dared to detain him till his original object was effected. Beck sullenly turned his horse's head, and the trooper, seeing how matters stood, made way and allowed him to return the way he had come.

"I'm afraid it's a spoilt job," said the magistrate to his watch-

mate; and yet we mustn't give it up: he may not meet Brown. Besides, if Brown absconds, we shall at all events now know why. No one else could give Brown the information that we are here."

Beck, in the meantime, reckless of his character, and stimulated by his sense of danger, was proceeding to do the very thing they expected, yet had not power to prevent. He rode nearly to the mouth of the Creek, and waited listening for the sounds of the horses of the police party from above, or of Brown's from below. Brown's horse was at length heard, and Beck faced down the Creek side to meet him.

"Pull your horse round, and come along with me," said the Black, as he kept on. "Hurley and one of the mounted police are waiting for you betwixt this and the hut."

The stockman's whole frame trembled at the sudden tidings: but Beck's composure assisted him to recover himself.

"You seem to take it very easy," said Brown. "What's up?"

"*Only*, that we're both *done*. I find I'm in a row about my cattle at the nor'ard, and I've just found out that you're in another here. Hurley and one of his police have been lying wait for you, and nailed me instead. But they didn't dare to keep me: that's the benefit of being a free man. If it was you, you'd be on your way now to the lodging where they give no blankets. Are you satisfied?"

"I'd ought to be so, if I aint. What are we to do?"

"Oh, there's nothing but the bush for it to-night, lad. We must camp somewhere off out of the regular track, among the ranges; and then, as soon as it's grey morning, we'll head as hard as we can for Dubbo's, or else Warraghi's hut, and get what we want for the present."

"Agreed," said the stockman: "there's nothing else can be done as I can see." And, clearing the ravine of the Creek, they pursued their course in the direction opposite to that in which the farm lay, till they thought the distance sufficient; and then, heading up over the first ridge, and down into the next low ground, where their fire would be out of sight, kindled it, shared the provisions Beck had brought with him, and camped for the night.

Mr. Hurley and his party kept their watch till long past midnight; and having once more searched the hut, and learned from the hutkeeper that Brown's absence was quite unexpected by him, they concluded that Beck had warned him, and returned to the township. This being at once the last and the most unsuccessful effort in Mr. Hurley's connexion with the police of the district, it annoyed him deeply: he left like one leaving behind him a marred performance.

Everything now was in confusion at the Rocky Springs. Mr. Hurley had missed the object of his journey: he felt doubtful whether Mr. Bracton, who was inflexible in requiring evidence of misconduct before believing it, would listen to his advice against depending any longer on Beck; whilst, personally, he felt convinced the welfare of the family was seriously involved in the question. The men were amazed by the non-appearance of their

overseer in the morning to direct them; nor were Mr. Bracton and his family less astonished: all were at a loss; whilst they had the additional discomfort of surveying the ruin wrought by the marauders, and seeing the slain savage lay ghastly, stiff, and hideously contorted, beside the building where he met his end. As the morning advanced, the disposition of the men to disregard all control and order showed itself more unrestrainedly than ever. It being a new job, however, and as the sight of the corpse was offensive even to themselves, they buried it out of sight. But after that, each one went his own way hither and thither: some lounged in the hut, others went down to the creek to wash their clothing, while a few set off on visits to their acquaintances at the sheep stations. Mr. Bracton waited in hope and expectation of Beck's return, supposing he had ridden early out to one of the stations. But the Australian conceived what was the real state of the case: he was not prepared to expect it beforehand, but he comprehended its high probability now; and, without allowing himself to make any further communication, awaited the solution which time alone appeared likely to furnish.

Towards noon, Mr. Hurley arrived, and gave an account of the events of the previous evening. Thus the Australian, coming to a further knowledge of Beck's nefarious practices, found himself justified in adding his quota of information respecting the warrant: which, of course, illustrated the whole case.

In the evening Mr. Hurley took his leave; and scarcely had he departed, when a shepherd, who was stationed with a single flock at the farthest-out station, arrived, and added the final item to the catalogue of barbarian depredations. The aborigines had encountered him with his flock in the bush, and after a long colloquy amongst themselves, in which some were evidently dissuading and the rest proposing the step, had seized his flock, and driven it off. In the dispute, Beck's name was frequently mentioned on the part of the promoters of the aggression; and that of "Misser Kable" by the more peaceable of them: who, however, were not above a third of the number.

"And you looked on, and let them settle it as they liked?" said the Australian. "Don't you know that one resolute white man would have turned the scale under such circumstances? The guilty always see three enemies where there is only one."

"I wasn't going to throw my life away so foolish," replied the shepherd, sneeringly. "I'm not allowed a musket to protect myself, and I'm told if I buy one, and use it, I shall be hanged for my pains, like the SEVEN STOCKMEN were. Don't you think I'm going to be such a flat. You swells set more store by the life of a sheep or a bullock than by the life of a man."

"I can't deny that there's reason in what you say," said the Australian; "but recollect it was not the 'swells' that caused the stockmen to be so unaccountably condemned to death. The gentry of the country were all for their lives being spared. Either government ought to find you efficient protection, or else allow you to protect yourselves."

"That's the first time ever I heard anybody say that on this farm, except the overseer," said the shepherd, with a sort of surly gratitude for the recognition of a just principle.

"Which way are the blacks gone? or rather can you give me directions to the spot where they took the sheep from you?"

"About a mile up the creek from our station," was the answer.

"I'll have the flock again by to-morrow evening, Mr. Bracton," said Reuben. "*Twenty-dogs-in-one* will run 'em down, if she once gets on the track. Wont you, little woman?"

"Youp, youp, youp," barked the vigilant and intelligent little colley, as she ran impatiently to and fro in the direction in which she had seen the shepherd come in.

"Find my mate, shepherd," continued Reuben, "and send him to me: he's somewhere not far off in the flat, feeding the cattle home. *You* can bring the cattle, you know, and put 'em in the stockyard: but mind to put up the rails safe. Tell my mate to bring up his horse and mine. We'll take a couple of fowling-pieces, Mr. Bracton; more for show, though, I expect, than use."

It was not, however, till twilight had disappeared, and the moon alone shed its faint light upon the scene, that Mr. Kable and Charlie found themselves passing out of hearing of the sounds of the farm. The moon was so far advanced as to be shining till within about an hour of daybreak; giving them plenty of time to reach the distance of about thirty miles, at which they expected by starting at once to overtake the blacks. The journey to the station was one in which it would be impossible to make any mistake; as they had either the river close on the one hand, or a range of mountains within easy sight on the other, to guide them throughout. And their own knowledge of the general course the tribe must take, to its own grounds, along with the information they would obtain from the hutkeeper, and the unerring nose of the little colley-bitch when placed on the track of a flock, were together amply able to ensure a successful search.

Hour after hour they rode steadily on, now conversing with that cheerful and manly freedom which marks the intercourse of Australians with one another, now lapsed each in his reverie; only halting occasionally to strike a light and kindle their short pipes, or descend the bank of the river for a drink.

"Martin Beck 's a rum 'un, isn't he, Reuben?" observed Charlie. "I knew him when he was quite a little chap. He 's done, now, I think."

"He'll be off to some other part, now, and try it on, most likely," said Reuben. "I have heard his name over and over again, since he has been Mr. Bracton's overseer, yet it never struck me he was one of old Beck's sons of Cook's River: but as soon as I saw him, I knew him as the black native I saw several years ago getting timber in the brushes in our quarter. He's a first-rate bushman, Charlie. It's a great pity. I was told that, after he bolted from Broken Bay side, he was master of several hundred head of very good cattle."

"He ought to be content," said Charlie.

"But," added Reuben, "there's as many 'cross' cattle as 'square' ones among 'em. The fact is, from what I can learn of him, he'd go through fire and water to get money."

"He always was that way from a boy," replied the youth. "I recollect, when he was about fourteen and I was four or five years old, we used to live close to his father; and when herding the working bullocks in the bush, he used to bring his axe with him and cut loads of firewood for the men that cart it into the town. I've known him earn a couple of shillings a day that way. They used to give him a shilling a load. But," continued Charlie, laughing, "I never saw him with any money but what he was getting at the time: he never could give 'em change. It was always put out of sight directly. Then he went to the Coal River; and four or five years afterwards we heard that he was master of a snug lot of cattle. I consider he's a disgrace to the natives, Reuben. I hope he'll get lagged."

"Poor devil," said the elder Australian. "A man must do something, you know, Charlie. And there he is as you may say all alone in the world: the white people think nothing of him. And what else can he do but look out for himself?"

"If I was him," said Charlie, "I should go to America. There's plenty of his own people there: isn't there?"

"Yes. But then, after all, this is home to him. By-the-bye, old chap, how are you and my little country girl at the Wallombi getting on? Is it settled yet?"

"*What* settled?" asked Charlie. "Hark! I'll be shot if I don't think we're close to the sheep-station: didn't you hear the dogs?"

"No! nor you neither," replied his companion, after listening an instant. "It was the dogs at the Wallombi you were thinking of. They tell me you've wore a regular track across the bush and down the rock at the back of the hut. Did the dogs worry you much that time?"

"Oh, you shut up."

"I was told that the old man vows that as sure as ever—"

"There!" exclaimed Charlie, triumphantly, "I told you it was the station: there's the light."

The hutkeeper, expecting the overseer from the farm along with a sufficient body of assistance for the pursuit, had tea made and food ready for the refreshment of the party; and Reuben and his countryman having gladly performed the part of substitutes, and obtained the hutkeeper's guidance to the spot whence the sheep were driven by the blacks, again set forward. The little bitch now knew her work, and through the last two hours' light of the moon put forth all her sagacity and activity. As the blacks had driven right a-head, there was no complication of the track by crossing and spreading: the whole flock had moved forward in a mass, along a direct line for the mountains. All that it was requisite for the horsemen to do was to keep their eyes and ears open to the course, and the occasional note the dog uttered to call

them forward, when she had advanced much more rapidly than them. Still the sameness of the pursuit wearied, and they fell into conversation once more; Charlie secretly resolving to carry the war into his friend's quarters at the first opportunity.

"What a queer lot most part of these emigrants are," said Charlie. "They seem like a set of children. They have no notion how to help themselves till they've been here half the length of a man's life."

"Not all of them, Charlie. Look at all those old commissaries: how soon *they* feather their nests."

"Ay, ay: but that's a different thing: it's in a manner their trade. This old chap at the Rocky Springs, the men tell me, never gives an order himself; and he looks just as if he'd done nothing all his life but sit and munch roast beef between the muzzles of two cannon."

"Well," said Reuben Kable, "he certainly does take the loss of his sheep and all the other devilment of the blacks as easily as ever I yet saw a man meet the troubles of life. But you see he has been led wrong from the first: he has been depending on his overseer instead of on himself. If he had used his own judgment, and insisted on having his own way, such a man as Martin would have been invaluable to him; whereas, as it is, through trusting Beck too much, he has tempted him into all this treachery and manœuvring. For I imagine, from what the police magistrate says, that Beck has been playing a deeper game than is yet known. The old gentleman's niece at the cottage tells me that the bullock driver, whom he has evidently been scheming for many months back to get out of his way, is a most faithful and excellent servant; and, you know, no overseer would do that unless he was aware that the man knew too much."

"I say, Reuben," said Charlie, "that Miss Katharine, as they call her, would make you a rattling fine wife—and she seems the most sensible of the lot."

"Ha! I don't suppose she would have me, Charlie," replied his countryman. "They are brought up in such a fantastical, fal-de-ral way, that a man is nobody in their eyes if he can't cut as many capers as a dancing-master. But then, you know, mate, every one of us native chaps can't expect to be in luck in our own country. It isn't everybody that can get the chance of wearing a path like a cattle-track across fifteen miles of rock, and gully, and forest, and swamp, down to the back of a hut on the Wallombi."

"You know nothing about it," said Charlie; "so don't gammon as you do."

"I know this," said his countryman, "that if I were the old man, I'd keep a look-out night and day for three months, but I'd have the dogs upon you."

"Ah, lad, but there's somebody looking out on my side that wouldn't have it that way!" retorted the youth, laughing triumphantly.

"I should think it must make anybody very sleepy," pursued his companion, "to spend a couple of nights a week going fifteen

miles out and fifteen back, in that way; beside the three hours marching and hugging in the fog. Two months at Manaroo will be quite a spell for you, Charlie. Look! the bitch has got 'em in her eye!"

"Where?"

"Yonder she stands, on the top of the rock—the rock that juts out from the range on the other side of the creek. Don't you see where that bluff cragg juts out, and makes an elbow in the channel?"

"I see her now: she looks back at us. Call her down: she'll bark directly, and give 'em warning."

"Not she: she knows what we're at as well as we know ourselves. There! didn't I tell you so?" continued Reuben, as the dog came bounding down and across the creek-bed toward them: thus retracing her way for the first time since she set off on the track."

It was yet hardly more than cold peep of day. A heavy dew bathed the branches, whence it showered down, as they shook them in passing, like rain upon the grass. The air was so still, that even the mist which hung about moved not: where it had gathered copiously, there it lay like a cloud; where the earth was less dank, the air was almost clear. Dismounting and unbuckling their bridles, bits, and passing them round saplings and rebuckling them to their the two Australians, directing their dog to keep behind them, crept silently up on to the crag whence she had returned. Still as death and scarcely a hundred yards below, lay the dark marauders, around their faintly smouldering fires. At the head of each man stood his two, three, or four spears, stuck into the ground, point upwards; and about amongst these lay the boomarangs and nullah-nullahs. The dogs, careless after their gorge to secure their usual snug quarters in the warmth, lay scattered about the camp on their sides, with distended ribs and limbs outstretched: not one among them raised his head or moved an ear. The camp was on a small flat, of which it occupied one half, the other half being covered with the sheep: they were confined on two sides by an elbowing water-hole in the creek, whilst along the other side the depredators had run a hasty fence of boughs, thus making a triangular yard. It was a slight but sufficient fence, for the flock, in a state of fatness fully fit for the butcher, was completely fagged with the sharp driving. They lay packed in a close motionless mass: all but a few who stood up, staring about, as if perplexed at finding themselves in such unusual company. Now and then one coughed, but not a bleat was heard. And, finishing the scene with its special feature, in various places lay whole frames of sheep with the flesh cut off, and skins; several of the latter already transformed into beds.

"If we could only get hold of the spears," said Charlie. "But the dogs would hear us."

"We'll do it another way, Charlie. I'll crawl down and stand by old Bondi's fire, while you stop here on the rock; and when I begin to *koo-ek!* you look the way we've come, and *koo-ek!* too;

and then in the course of a couple of minutes, fire off one of your barrels, as if you were giving a signal."

"Arn't you jerran to try it on?" asked the younger Australian.

"Not at all: between them that are on our side already, and them that will be, as soon as they think the soldiers are coming, we shall have the odds. They'll think I should never go into the camp that way, if there wasn't plenty of help at hand. Besides, it will come on 'em all of a sudden."

"Very well, mate: only look out before it's too late, if they turn out game."

"Never fear," said Reuben. "Faint heart never won fair lady. Don't let the dog come till I'm there."

Noiselessly, avoiding every dry twig upon the ground that might yield a sound by the crush of his foot, and stilling even his breath, Reuben Kable stepped round along the hill side, and down into the camp, whilst Charlie stooped down and held the bitch, blindfolding her with his jacket. Reuben stood for an instant by old Bondi's fire, where, one on either side of him, slept also his two sons; then dropping the but of his piece roughly, but not heavily on the old king's shins, he uttered the piercing *koo-eh!* long protracting the first syllable: as is done when the party signalized are supposed to be barely within reach of the voice at its strongest strain. The old savage twisted himself awkwardly but hastily up, with a groan.

"Murry bellyache belonging to stockwhip, I believe," said the Australian, in a tone mingling admonition with commiseration, as he stooped down and quietly put a live coal on his pipe, and began to smoke.

Another and another sprang to his feet, for the whole camp was aroused by the wild trumpet-like *koo-eh:* a loud, harsh jabber of dialogue, rapid and incoherent, rose, and became again still; again rose, and was still, the dogs gathering and snarling around the white intruder, but from habit afraid to bite in camp.

"Murry stupid fellow you, old Bondi: always was. *Koo-eh!*" shouted Reuben again, putting his hand beside his mouth, to guide the sound, and pouring it forth with all the force of inner and outward muscle. "You want to be shot, I believe. Suppose toger (soldier) make-a-light you to-day; good bye, old King Bondi. Baal that yan Manaroo any more: only tumble down here; and white fellow put him along-a-bimble (into the earth.)"

"Baal, Misser Kable; baal budgery, that: that no good."

Off now went one of Charlie's barrels, suddenly rattling in echo from rock to rock. "Fire again, mate, if you don't hear any *koo-eh*," cried Reuben. "Bondi want some breakfast in handcuffs along-a-toger."

"Baal me been take away jumbuc, Misser Kable," said Tallboy, who made his appearance with all his weapons in his hands, prepared for flight, if he found it necessary. "Baal me," chimed in Miaminghi, as if speaking with a locked-jaw. "Baal me too," said another, and another, coming round. On the other hand,

the real Myals, one after another, as they could gather their belts and spears, and tobacco-pouches and pipes together, after the confusion of the last evening's feast, were crossing the creek, and shooting away over the range on the opposite bank. This was the instant to be improved. The retreating Myals would not improbably pause and watch from where they were: but they would not follow.

"What black fellow yan along-a-me and drive jumbuc, suppose I give him plenty tobacco?"

"I yan," said one. "I yan," said another and another.

"Very well: murry make haste. Then baal I coula (angry) when blackfellow come to my station at Manaroo."

Considerably above half the entire party now assisted to turn out the flock, and urge it, with as rapid a pace as sheep could be made to travel at without injury, in the direction of the hut. Whilst the broken and dispirited remainder, indignant at the disaffection, and expecting the mounted police were in the vicinity, and had been signalized by the discharge of the gun, made the best of their way out of the vicinity. By dinner time the flock was in the care of its own shepherd, minus about twenty, lost, knocked up, and slaughtered; and the plenty of tobacco duly delivered into the hands of Bondi, with this final caution from the Australian:

"Murry fool you, old Bondi: almost murry rascal, I believe. Myal blackfellow steal, Bondi patter (eat). That just the same thing. Now you make-a-light (conceive—understand). That old man settler, my friend. Suppose you let Myall blackfellow manu jumbuc 'nother time belonging to my friend, then old King Bondi never come to my station any more. I never give King Bondi wikki (bread), bullock (beef), bacca, nothing at all; only shoot him directly."

"Baal I want to take away jumbuc," said Bondi, "only that overseer belonging to settler been pialla (tell) wild blackfellow, murry gourri jumbuc (very fat sheep) sit down station. 'Pose blackfellow take 'em away; baal white fellow catch him. And then that want it: and when I pialla '*baal*' that Myal blackfellow pialla '*Yes, I must have it.*'"

"Who pialla?" asked the Australian: "overseer?"

"Overseer," said Bondi; "overseer rascal: baal Bondi rascal," he added, whiningly, endeavouring to exculpate himself, and forgetting that he was caught in the act."

"Oh, yes; Bondi rascal too. Bondi sit down along-a cottage when I come along-a yerriman. But all gone coula mine (my anger) this time. Only blackfellow never do it again. When overseer pialla that way?

"That many night," said Bondi, exhibiting his first three fingers. "When blackfellow camp along-a Rocky-pring."

Tallboy, and Miaminghi, who were of the party at Beck's hut on the night in question, confirmed this statement; adding, that their comrade, whom the corporal shot, was another of the party,

and the most strenuous counsellor of the outrage; and further, that it was through his intervention that the entire proceeding had been undertaken at the instance of Morgan Brown.

"So that our coming has just broke up the nest, Charlie," said his companion, as they rode back to the farm. "If I hadn't recognised Martin Beck, he would have gammoned how sorry he was for all this, and gone and ridden about the bush till the flock was clean away, pretending he had been looking for them. And if the police had nailed Morgan Brown, and put him in gaol, Beck would have driven the cattle, if they've been doing anything in that way, out of this quarter, and planted them; and then if Brown had even turned evidence, there would have been Beck's *No* to his *Yes*."

As they had taken a sleep on the shepherd's and hutkeeper's berths whilst the horses fed, it was past dark before the two Australians made in to the farm. But it was not long afterwards before Charlie had disposed of a good supper in the big hut, and lit his pipe, and arranged himself for a reverie: and in its dissolving views we have good authority for saying the chief and most vivid object was one Esther, living on the Wallombi Creek, not unmindful that there were good things in the world that a maiden of seventeen might become, over and above being a good daughter. And in the parlour of the cottage his countryman was atoning for his long duncehood in the same school by his habitual vigour of apprehension, promoted by the fair presence of his tutor.

CHAPTER XXV.

Katharine and Reuben—Protection of Aborigines—Reuben offers his services as Overseer—Misunderstanding—Acute perception of the Australian.

MORNING came, and once more the sun shone cheerful and brilliant through the windows of the breakfast room: where glass again supplanted empty frames. After what he had learned from Mr. Hurley, Lieutenant Bracton was fully prepared for the further announcement from Reuben Kable, of Beck's connivance and promotion of the outrage of the aborigines. Still he seemed to approach only very slowly, and with perplexity, the conclusion that a far different state of things might have existed if he had mingled with and controlled affairs more himself. It must be admitted that a great change of mental habit is required to transmute the naval or military commander—especially of the British force, where subordinates are so much to be depended on—into an Australian settler, who must depend upon others so little: but it is equally certain, that if the individual cannot succeed in effecting that change, he had much better seek some other method of consummating an honourable career.

Breakfast was over, and still the sun shone in cheerful and brilliant, as Katharine and Reuben stood together looking from the window. Some of the men, now superintended by their master, were re-arranging the store, and others were replacing the door. In that spirit of forbearance, which the lower orders, when seriously appealed to, never fail to manifest, they had neither followed the example of pillage, nor left the building without sufficient protection from depredation; as they worked, however, it might easily be discerned that, now Beck was gone, all, save one or two, felt themselves to be their own masters. The Australian, scarcely less amused than vexed at the air of impudent unconcern with which they passed and repassed Mr. Bracton, and stood or loitered and made their remarks under his very nose, proposed to walk out on to the hill,

"May I go with you?" inquired Katharine.

"I shall be delighted to give you my arm," replied Reuben, readily. "You are head storekeeper, I recollect: you have probably not been to examine the damage done to your dominions yet?"

"No!" answered Katharine. "But you were taking out your pipe: now, I shall not debar you from that. Let us go when you have had your smoke: I have two or three little things to employ myself with for a few minutes."

The Australian thankfully accepted the permission to renew his acquaintance with the little black veteran of his waistcoat pocket, and filling and lighting his short pipe, passed out and walked to and fro in front. Katharine's business was apparently well calculated to the necessity of the period, for the pipe had scarcely given out its last whiff, and returned to its resting-place, when she was seen hurrying out for her expedition. In that hurry, too, bonnet and shawl had managed to get themselves put on with some little degree of more than common rakishness: indeed, even Biddy, as she cleared the table in the breakfast parlour, listened and wondered what could be so much accelerating Miss Katharine's generally easy pace, and breaking in upon its music-like regularity.

"See!" said the Australian; "it's a good half-hour past their breakfast time, and there are three of the scoundrels down in the flat, trying who can jump the creek best. I wish to the Lord Harry one of them would miss his leap, and jump in up to his neck."

"Oh! that's nothing," said Katharine. "I saw four or five playing at pitching half-pence into some holes they had dug in the ground at the back of the store, during the chief part of yesterday afternoon."

By this time, the young lady and her conductor had reached the spot where Mr. Bracton was superintending the reformatory operations at the store. The chief damage done consisted in the complete spoliation of the keg of rum; in almost every bag of sugar being chopped open with the tomahawks in the eagerness of the

s vages to get at their palatable contents; and finally, in the entire disappearance of the tobacco. But the helplessness of the owner of the property was even more pitiable than the destruction itself: he seemed to be labouring under a sense of the duty of exerting himself, without possessing any clear apprehension of what he should do. Reuben Kable and Katharine pursued their walk, alike sensible of the fact.

"Much allowance must be made for my uncle," said Katharine, as she unconsciously directed her own steps, and thus guided Reuben's, toward her now well-beaten track to the crown of the range. "Beck has certainly been a very useful man to him. Building after building, and fence after fence rose under his hand; the wheat was got into the ground and harvested, without there seeming even a need for Mr. Bracton to think about it. Indeed, for a long time, even the men were well managed."

"Mr. Bracton appears to me," said the Australian, "to have committed a class-error, if I may so express myself, rather than one peculiar to individual character. He has forgotten that he no longer has gentlemen for his deputies; and other characters again below them, so arranged as to act as mutual checks. In the sphere he formerly occupied, the interests also of his subordinates and deputies were correspondent to, and wrapped up in his own: whereas, now he is dealing with a class whose interest (as it seems to them) is to plunder him; and whose principles, moreover, are not calculated to check the temptation. Perhaps, after all, the lesson he has got is the best thing that has yet happened to him:— Whither does this track lead?"

"Only to the hill-top," said Katharine. "I really did not notice that we had taken it."

"What track is it?" inquired the Australian. "It can't be a cattle track, nor a black's track, nor the track to the township."

"I think I have worn it entirely myself, sir," said Katharine, confused and blushing, as it occurred to her how she had unconsciously guided Reuben to her favourite haunt.

"Ah! Polly told me what beautiful sketches of the surrounding country you had. I suppose this hill is the spot from which they were made."

"Yes!" said Katharine.

"Why, you have been a solitary traveller this way," said the Australian. "Or do you and Miss Marianna travel in file? I see the jump-ups are mounted, and the logs passed at the best spots for *one*, not for *two* side by side. I was merely about to say, let us take the easiest way for *two*, without regard to track," he continued, as Katharine made no reply; "I was incommoding, not helping you, where we were. Pray lean on my arm."

Katharine did lean: yet Reuben Kable still thought it was not enough.

"This is not the first time," he said, as, without assigning the reason, he paused and turned and looked down the hill, that his

companion might rest, "that I have had a 'skrimmage' with the Myals within sight of this spot. I was out in this part when I was quite a youngster, with two of the Hawkesbury natives, settling a station, and they attacked us one very warm afternoon. They did but little damage to us with their spears, for we had a dray as a shelter; but we had to bring down two of them before they would decamp."

"Of course, I am aware that in such a case you could not be doing wrong. But do you not think the aborigines need protection?"

"If you mean utter immunity from all reprisals for their outrages, of course I must say No: if you mean simple protection from serious unprovoked violence to their persons and goods, I can only assure you that nothing of the kind takes place, over a hundred miles of country, once in ten years. The supposition that they need protection is a pure delusion. A parcel of poor wretched savages come to our huts, without money, without clothing, without, in fact, a single article for the white man to steal: so far as their *property* is concerned, therefore, it must be self-evident that there is no need for a protectorate, constitutional or unconstitutional. As to *personal* protection, only put it to yourself, whether any need for it must not diminish just in proportion to the distance from the centres of civilization; so as to become null at the very point where it is chiefly paraded—where a dozen blacks are to be found for every white man. Can you imagine that anything less than necessity and duty can, in ordinary cases, tempt one or two *dozen* white men to assault about as many *hundred* savages? perfectly aware as the white men are of the unmitigable rancour the savage indulges in, in any such case: waiting even months for his revenge. If they need no protection of property and none of person, what other remains for them to need? Besides, the white man cannot be protected correspondingly: the aborigines, when they commit a crime, fly to the mountains. Now, it is most unjust to punish the white man for his aggression on the aborigines, when you cannot secure and punish them for their aggression on the white man. And this, I assure you, is clearly perceived and keenly felt by our pioneers. Rude as they are in speech and manners, they are generally men picked for their places, on account of their shrewd common sense; for no flock or herd owner sends a half-idiot to an out-station in charge of such valuable property. The effect on the blacks themselves generally has, therefore, been most mischievous: it has led to their being unceremoniously driven off stations, where previously they were kindly entertained. Now, setting aside the primary injury to themselves, how strongly must such a state of things tend to embitter them yet more against the white man, and prevent any little harmony of the two races that might otherwise subsist."

"You place the subject before me in a new light," said Katharine. "May I ask in what way you consider the case ought to be treated?"

"I should say, *by letting it alone*," replied the Australian. "The shepherds and stockmen are too good judges to go to the camps to molest the blacks. Let them, on their part, keep out of the huts. They grow nothing, and have no flocks. There never was a clearer case in the world for the white agriculturist and herdsman in seizing the land. Their food vanishes but slowly: there is actually good 'possum hunting now, within a day's stage of Sydney; and the country itself generally is very thinly peopled by the aborigines. The fact is this—The savages die off from the effects of various vices, not through want of food. To suppose that the tribes which have disappeared have done so through scarcity of animals on their hunting grounds, is what no one acquainted with the country would do. Their aggressions are almost wholly the result of ill feeling, in consequence of the *invasion of their territory:* but who will say that that invasion is an improper one. Individual quarrels bring the spirit into action, it is very true: but the spirit would find an outlet, if every other conceivable ground of offence were avoided. The first question is, shall we hold the land or resign it? And, it being decided that we are to hold it, then comes the question, shall we do so, checking intimidation by intimidation, and violence by violence? or shall we suffer the wrong side to have full swing at the cost of the right? For, as to the point—Whether reprisals shall go on by public machinery or individual action, it never was a question yet. Public machinery cannot touch the case: the savage flies to his fastnesses, and defies the policeman to catch him. Every man must be his own constable who goes to the extreme verge of civilization; and the retribution enforced must be palpable, prompt, and decisive. Indeed, the very best protection for the savage is, that the white man be not afraid of him. But here we are on the hill-top. Do you see our friend, Mr. Hurley, cantering towards us?"

"Where?"

"Yonder. He is just now where he overtook me so fortunately that day. How rapidly the time has passed."

"Do you know that I have a claim on your time, Mr. Kable, on behalf of your sister?"

"I heard something of it, Miss Katharine. I have half a mind, presuming on the present state of things and my acquaintance with his son, to propose to Mr. Bracton to allow me three or four weeks rations and house-room."

"To stay with us?" asked Katharine, looking up with an expression of delight that sent a thrill of joy through the young man's heart.

"Yes; to give in return my services as amateur overseer."

"It would be a favour almost without a limit, Mr. Kable," said the young lady, with a gravity and collectedness of manner and tone that undid all her previous speech had done.

"I can send my man on to Manaroo with the cattle," he con-

tinued, endeavouring to maintain as nearly as possible a sedate utterance. "The inconvenience to myself will be little, if any; whilst I may possibly be able to lessen considerably the difficulty of his fresh position to Mr. Bracton."

"I am glad Mr. Hurley has ridden over to-day," resumed Reuben Kable, after some seconds had elapsed without a remark on either part. "I heard, from Willoughby, a very high character of that bullock-driver whom you lately lost; and if Mr. Bracton should agree to accept me as his overseer for a month, and Mr. Hurley concurs in Willoughby's good opinion of the man, I should certainly recommend to Mr. Bracton to make an effort to get him assigned to him."

"Do you think it would be of any use?" inquired the young lady. "We thought it was a hopeless case."

"Oh dear, no! The stringency of law here, you know, is only for the poor. Of course, our friend Mr. Hurley will not go so far as to say so; but I may."

"We should be more deeply in your debt than ever," said Katharine. "We have all felt seriously vexed at losing him: he was of such a remarkably faithful and simple character, that we prized him greatly, apart from his mere usefulness as a servant."

"It strikes me," continued the Australian, "that he would be of much more service now than ever; especially if he could be induced to offer his opinion freely."

"He always does that," observed Katharine, smiling.

"No, no; not exactly as I mean. There are some men who 'mind their own business' in such a way as to make the virtue a very questionable one: so as almost, in fact, to change it into a vice. They habituate themselves to the idea of their standing axiom, till they see everything only and wholly from their own position. Such, it strikes me, from all I have heard, is the case with this Welshman. And yet his knowledge of things, from being many years in the country and so much on the roads, must be ample and general. I think that if Mr. Bracton can stimulate him to speak freely, he will get more than his own particular part of the story from him; and it will be generally the right end of the matter the man will manage to get foremost. I only speak, Miss Katharine, from the impressions I have received from Mr. Bracton, junior. I should like to hear Mr. Hurley's opinion: your own seems favourable."

"Very much so, indeed, Mr. Kable," replied the young lady. "When you give me such reasons for everything, how can I disagree with you?—But indeed—without that—I must say,—I think so myself."

"Shall we go down, then?"

"That you may ascertain the success of your application to be installed overseer?" archly inquired Katharine.

"Yes!"

"And I have been some time, too, away from Marianna. Poor child! I never knew her ill before."

"Miss Bracton must have been greatly terrified; and so must you have been yourself, Miss Katharine. I wonder you have got so well over it."

"Marianna was very unwell before, but I was not. That is how I have sustained the fright best. She has naturally much more elasticity of spirit than I have."

The Australian looked as if not at all prepared to be convinced that any one possessed any quality superior to the bright and peaceful presence at his side.

"I heard from Polly that your sister was ill; and it has been a sudden attack, too. You observed that you had never known her before. What is her indisposition? Violent cold?"

"Oh, no," said Katharine, hastily. "A mental affection," she added, after a slight hesitation.

"I beg pardon," said the young man: "I really made the inquiry quite innocently. I am fully aware it must be disagreeable to you to refer to such a matter with a stranger. You excuse me, I am sure, after this assurance."

"Nay, Mr. Kable, I was affecting no foolish shyness with you, who have been so truly, and constantly, and earnestly our friend. My hesitation arose from the difficulty I felt of giving you at once a just idea of the matter itself, and a fair one for Marianna. You know there has existed for a long time past an engagement, or something very like one, between my sister and Mr. Hurley. Mind, you must not mention my having told you about late events to any one: especially, you must not allow Mr. Hurley to suspect that you know anything about them."

As Katharine paused, and appeared to be waiting for a promise to the effect, Reuben Kable tendered it.

"Well, you must know that the foolish, naughty girl, has quarrelled with Mr. Hurley: quarrelled with him very wrongfully; and she feels the bitterness of the consequences, whilst she still remains too proud to rescind the fault."

"Sad!" said the Australian.

"And all that we can say or do, we cannot persuade her to reconsider her resolution. She is naturally very high-spirited; and (if such a thing could be with a sister) perhaps I have let her have too much of her own way: indeed, papa and mamma, and Willoughby, and Charles, and all our friends, have always done the same. We always felt we had a sure hold of her, in any serious matter, in an appeal to her feelings and generosity; but in this affair she seems determined to be her own mistress, without regard to any reasoning whatever from us."

"Very proper too, it seems to me," said the Australian.

"No, Mr. Kable. Nor would you say so if you knew the whole case: I am sure you would not. The bullock-driver you were talking of is the assumed bone of contention. Mr. Hurley enforced the law in his case as he would have done in any other; and Marianna was angry on behalf of her protégé. Then she pretends to imagine that Mr. Hurley had evaded some promise he had

made never to thwart her wishes, if she with consideration expressed them; whereas it must be evident that he could only mean in private life, not in his public sphere. And when shamed out of that, she takes final refuge in the fancy that she has become afraid of him. No: you know it is really very wrong. It is an unkindness of treatment which Mr. Hurley has not merited from her. I am sure I would never do so: I could not."

"Mr. Hurley," said the Australian, half musingly, "seems to be earning every golden opinion. So you think, Miss Katharine, that it is a pity there should be a breach. In short, you take Mr. Hurley's part in the affair, *decidedly*."

"*Most* decidedly," said Katharine. "Whilst I love my sister as much, indeed much more at this very time than ever, Mr. Hurley's conduct has my fullest approbation. I have always felt the highest esteem for him; but now it grows upon me." And innocently as Innocence itself, she laughed at her own frank acknowledgment.

"Pretty plain this," was the first thought that darted through the Australian's mind, as they pursued their way in silence down the last declivity of the range. But again he thought, "This is a beautiful creature; worth her weight in gold. By-the-bye, whilst she is uttering her regard for this gipsy-looking lawyer in *words*, is she not manifesting it to me in *deed*, by telling me her little secrets? Now I recollect, too, I am not to tell them again."

"We shall find your friend at the cottage by the time we get there, Katharine," said the Australian.

"Oh!" said Katharine—supposing Mr. Kable meant Rachael, for whom the cart had been sent over at her own urgent request—"Miss Moses is the kindest of human beings. I see no sign of Mr. Hurley," she added, as they emerged into the clear space.

"There's his horse," said the Australian, pointing some distance across the flat. "He has been here some time, you see."

"How?" inquired Katharine, as she looked in perplexity for some token of the lapse of time. "I don't understand."

"Don't you see the animal's back under the saddle is dry? and he was cantering too fast not to have been wet enough when he got here."

"Well! it would have been a long time before I should have got to that conclusion from the same grounds. Is there anything in the bush that you do *not* see, Mr. Kable?" asked Katharine; recollecting the inquisition that so nearly concerned herself on the origin of the track up the hill.

"Not much, I believe," replied the Australian, laughing in his turn. "The fact is, it is our study. A mark upon a tree, which you might never notice, tells us the tale of a circle of ground two or three miles in semi-diameter. On the earth of the creek banks is written the bulletin of a flock of sheep. Half-a-dozen sounds collected by the ear about nightfall, direct our last half-hour's course in search of a night's lodging. But after all, it is a poor life: existence, where there are no ladies, is a miserably incomplete humanity."

"So I have heard gentlemen many times say," said Katharine, longing and yet hesitating to look up in the face of the tall speaker; until at length she had feigned a curiosity, and formed a question that gave the opportunity,—"The part of the country where you live is very rough and mountainous, is it not, Mr. Kable?" But by this time whatever expression there might have been upon his face, was gone. The Australian's keen grey eye was fixed upon another group of idlers, and the active, concentrated scowl that seemed almost to glitter upon his polished, ivory-like features, awed and intimidated her.

CHAPTER XXVI.

The Amateur Overseer—Plea for the Welshman—Course of Beck and Brown—The Basin of Rocks—The Outlaws at Ghibber Gunyah—Beck's Brutality—His Prospects and Policy.

For the first time since the attack of the aborigines, Mrs. Bracton found her spirits and health sufficiently reinstated to take her place at the dinner table; and she had the satisfaction, whilst doing so, of knowing that Rachael, daily more endeared to the family as she was better known, occupied her post in the chamber of her daughter. Mr. Hurley, too, was present: but it was with that cloud upon the spirit that darkens the social scene around, as truly and perceptibly as the rolling mass of vapour the face of the earth. Those who had known Katharine before, would have said she looked milder, lovelier, purer than ever; those who had not, as was the case with Reuben Kable, must have been impressed with that rare beauty where pure ethereality of soul melts into and mingles with the rich and glowing development of maidenhood. The Australian managed most adroitly to seat Katharine as his own neighbour. Mr. Bracton seemed the least changed of all in the family circle, although the most concerned by the late events. There was a little less rotundity of form, from the unwonted exertion, and much more freshness of colour along with it. The squall, severe as it was, had evidently swept over without starting a plank or splintering a boom. Reuben Kable's young countryman would have said Lieutenant Bracton seemed only as if he had had a sharp lurch and had recovered himself, and got "all square" again, as he sat at his beef between two great guns.

"Capital *donovans*, sir?" said the Australian, as he lifted the cover of the tureen. "Some of the finest I have seen this year. They are of your own growing, of course?"

"Yes:—the seed merely thrown in, six inches deep, in the furrow of the first sod turned over by the plough, on a piece of new ground, and the clod just hooked back on to it with the hoe."

"They would fetch a good price in Sydney: I saw none equal to them in the market. This is certainly a fine quarter of the country for potatoes. Miss Katharine; these being native produce, and I knowing the excellence of *all native products*, can't mistake in recommending *them*."

"Oh," replied Katharine, looking round, "when I see anything is really good with my own eyes, *it* needs no recommending to me."

"A drowning man may be forgiven for catching at a twig," said the Australian, in a voice audible only to the ear it was directed to; looking at Katharine, while he waited on Mrs. Bracton.

The glance no longer intimidated her: it was rather the expression of an habitual pensive self-possession, enlivened by the ingenuous cheerfulness befitting the season. And now she felt quite at home, intimately at home, at the young Australian's side.

"Mr. Kable has an offer to make you, papa; or, rather, I should say, a proposal," said Katharine.

"Or still rather, *a suggestion*," rejoined the Australian; catching sight of the humour that began to play around Mr. Hurley's mouth, at the unfortunate choice of terms. "It is neither more nor less, sir, than the old hard bargain,—a month's wages for a month's work. I can spare a month just at the present season, and Charlie can take my cattle on, if you will lend me a man to send with him. Both my old stock-keeper and this lad are trustworthy: I can leave them to do any branding that needs to be done; and I think it probable I may be able, in the course of that time, to offer a hint or two which you will find useful in making a start so completely *de novo*. Wages—rations, and hut room."

"You are already the first of our penates, Mr. Kable," said Mrs. Bracton. "My dear boy is already infinitely indebted to you. Mr. Hurley, I presuppose you know that you are not to be disturbed from your niche. You hold your place at our hearth by prescription; which, I believe, amongst lawyers is held an indisputable form of title."

"I can only heartily thank you," said Mr. Bracton. "Perhaps it would be better still if you were to be master, and I to take some lessons as overseer. It's a good while now since I made one of the *hands* in a watch: but in a new profession one must be content, I see, to begin at the bottom of the ladder."

"I should have offered any assistance I may be capable of giving in this way, long ago, sir," said the Australian, "but that I supposed you in some degree acquainted with farm affairs before you arrived in this country; and I also heard so high a character from Willoughby of your late overseer."

"We resided some years in a country village at home," said Mrs. Bracton, "but it was, I must tell you also, on the very edge of the sea," she added, smiling. "You may imagine how much of Mr. Bracton's time and walks were occupied by the fields, with often two hundred sail of shipping, of one sort and another, lying in the bay, under the lee of the headland."

"I am sure Mr. Bracton will fully comprehend the whole routine of the farm business, ordinary and extraordinary," continued Reuben, "with very little attention. In fact, the chief thing for the master to look to is the discipline of the farm. I by no means undervalue a knowledge of the business operations: but the main thing is knowledge and control of the hands. Where there is one applicant for an overseership unfit for the berth, through ignorance of labour and farm business generally, there are twenty most incompletely qualified on the point of worth and force of character: that is a quality for which a master must look to himself. Mr. Bracton possesses the requisite, only it has never been brought to bear. The men, in short, need to be made to feel that their duties must be steadily and faithfully done,—not trifled with. And no one is so capable of making them feel that, as the person who pays them. This maintenance of a due discipline on a farm, in fact, almost involves the rest. I am an enthusiastic hater of all tyranny: I never had a man punished in my life; nor had I ever yet occasion to send a free man to gaol: but no one can insist more inflexibly than I do on the fulfilment of the contract. *I pay; therefore you must work.* And, really, most of them know their duties so well, that if once you convince them that you are quite in earnest in exacting the performance of them, you will have very little further trouble."

"I see already," said Mr. Bracton, "that much of what you have observed is the case. Several of the fellows, to-day, when I have told them to go off to their work, have looked me in the face and asked me what they were to go and do, in a way that fully convinced me they knew, but chose to play on my want of experience. I had a great mind several times to set every idle man to break up a piece of new ground with the hoe: but I knew of old that the system of drilling men for drilling's sake, when they have a tendency to be mutinous, only makes them worse; so I restrained myself. I never like to be hasty in such matters. If you commit one false step of that kind, and offend the sense of justice in men under your command, they never forget or forgive it: your moral influence is completely gone."

"I am glad you treated the matter so sagaciously, sir," said the Australian. "A few hours, I hope, will set much to rights; and I think a few weeks will place your farm affairs on a better footing than ever hitherto. Mr. Hurley's assistance will be needed."

"In what way can I contribute, Mr. Kable?" inquired Mr. Hurley.

"I believe, sir," said the Australian, "though your duty as police-magistrate made it imperative on you to send the man, John Thomas, back into Government employ (I am indebted to Miss Katharine for the information), you did so with much regret."

"Yes."

"His character as an upright and as a useful man, then, I suppose, stands high in your estimation?"

"Very."

"It would not become me to ask whether it was his agreement to act as a shepherd. Of course he could not have been made to do so legally, if it was not."

"It was," said Mr. Hurley. "He engaged for general service, conditionally on receiving an order to do it; and the overseer gave the order. He did not even start the point in his own favour to the bench."

"Well! all that admitted," said the Australian, "it was not a fair thing to keep him to general service: it was straining the meaning of his agreement. A bullock-driver's engagement, under such circumstances (especially the old stated bullock-driver of a farm), only contemplates an emergency; not settled and constant occupation, week after week, at general duties."

"I am sure," said Mr. Hurley, "I felt the most extreme regret at the hardship of the case: but still the letter of the law hedged me in. I could do no otherwise than as I did."

"Don't misconceive me, Mr. Hurley," said the Australian. "I know the law full well; and your just administration of it is already fully accredited to me by the slight acquaintance with yourself which as yet I have had the pleasure of enjoying: but the hardship to the man being so great, on the one hand, and the inconvenience to the master so very serious, on the other, can you not promote an endeavour to regain him to Mr. Bracton?"

"I am already planning that very endeavour myself, Mr. Kable," replied Mr. Hurley.

"Then, with Mr. Bracton's concurrence, nothing better can be done than to consign the business entirely over into your hands."

"Certainly," said Mr. Bracton.

"There will then be a man on the farm both well acquainted with the business, and sufficiently trustworthy to be looked to for an honest opinion: and with such a manifesto, in all common matters, our host himself will very soon become quite at home among them. I shall enter upon my situation of amateur overseer, with Mr. Bracton's permission, to-morrow morning."

"You will find the hands in a most intolerable state of insubordination," said Mr. Hurley. "There are two or three fellows, in particular, who corrupt all the rest. I can give Mr. Bracton no further help: I have done all threats can do; and they are knowing enough to keep out of reach of the law."

Once more Katharine stole a glance at the face of her friend; who, having carried his point, had thrown himself back in his chair: but if he had any opinion upon Mr. Hurley's remark, his countenance did not express it.

It was on the evening of this day, an hour or two later, that the stockkeeper—who has been mentioned several times as Warraghi, and who owed the designation to the circumstance of his residing at a spot so called by the aborigines—made his way to the place where Beck and Brown had concealed themselves when they absconded, after having visited his hut and Dubbo's, and procured such articles as they needed. Their hiding-place lay some distance

back, in an inlet of the mountains, between twenty-five and thirty miles down the Morrumbidgee from the Rocky Spring Creek. The Morrumbidgee is a large and main river, rising on the inner side of the Dividing Range which separates the eastern from the western waters, and flowing directly toward the yet unoccupied wildernesses of the interior of the island. The overseer and stockman, in thus pursuing its course forward, were leaving more populous parts, where they might have been seen and traced, for others unpeopled and secure; though the general surface of the country was far from intricate and difficult to traverse. In many parts it consisted of treeless plain and hill; in others of very open forest, with here and there a track of thickly-wooded mountain, intersected by the gullies and creeks, which carry off the water in such localities. When, therefore, at the instance of Warraghi and Dubbo, they made their way to the inlet, it was on account of its facilities for concealment: being just below Warraghi's and Dubbo's stations, it was well known to them; but, as yet, Beck and his companion were but little acquainted with it.

The inlet was reached on passing over a long point of mountain that ran down riverward from the main range, which lay parallel to the stream. This point, with another half a mile further down, enclosed a fine, level, grassy flat; about midway of which there appeared a spacious waterhole, or pond, full to the brim and level of the grassy bank around. The extension of the arm of low land was consequently back from the river into the mountains.

Turning their horses' heads up the open track of green sward, on which the mild light of the autumn sun was shining, they traversed the first reach; and then turning, still between the hills along to the left, came round into another reach; and so onward, up another and another. Each had its greater or lesser waterholes: but mostly under the bluffs in the corners of the elbows, where the hills, varying their direction, opposed the stream when running in flood; and so, making eddies in those places, wore down the surface, and left the natural reservoirs for the element. Thus they rode on for four or five miles, until the watercourse seemed to be traced back to its infancy; when a narrow gorge presented itself, barely sufficient for the passage of horsemen.

On passing through this gorge, a wide and level circle, of a mile or more in diameter, with barrier rocks girding it on all sides, lay stretched before them. Here all was still as death. In one or two places there were tracks of single cattle, that had wandered from even their own wild comrades on some solitary fancy; but no beaten and worn paths: all round, to the edge of the top of the rocks, grew midsized mountain timber; as a whole, close and sombre. In four or five places the surface drainage was trickling in streams, or dripping in fast-following drops from the verge, and soaking on through the ground of the basin, or creeping weakly along it to a common centre and outlet at the lower level of the gorge. At the extreme left, a large crag of hard rock, which had maintained its shelf-like prominence whilst the softer stone beneath had crumbl-

into sand, or been worn away by some other agency, overhung, both sideways and inwardly, several yards of open space. The floor of this natural chamber was a deep bed of sand; not moist, as it might have been expected to be at this season of the year. Being elevated some inches, and free from drain-water, the daily breeze sufficed to dissipate the moisture occasionally deposited by the atmosphere; and it seemed still dry as the summer heat had left it. It was one of the class of natural excavations called, in the phrase of the colony, Ghibber Gunyahs.

It was, however, not alone on account of its remote and inaccessible situation that the Basin of Rocks had been recommended by Warraghi and Dubbo to their less fortunate friends: this was one of those places, occasionally met with in the course of the white man's discoveries, which lie under a superstitious disrepute with the aborigines. None of the neighbouring tribes ever approached the dreaded precinct: sire had told to son, for ages past, that evil spirits howled in that melancholy glen; and when some too-adventurous camp had been pitched for the night on the mountain sides beyond, the intent and trembling occupants had seen and watched, in sleepless affright, thin blue lights appearing and vanishing, resting and darting;—now crowding together, then separating, and apparently chasing each other through the tangled thickets of the fen.

Such was the scene where Beck and Brown stood warming themselves at their outlaw's fire, far on in the evening of the very day on which Mr. Hurley had consented to promote the return of John Thomas to the Rocky Springs. The wheel of destiny had revolved, as it ever will, for all who patiently await its revolution: for the beginning is *action*, the end *consequence*, and the medium *law*. All men are not to have all the good; much less are the evil to have it.

The evening was far advanced, and the two outlaws stood listening, awaiting a visit from Dubbo and Warraghi. Their fire sent up its long tongues of flame through the darkness just in front of the projecting rock beneath which they had taken up their quarters; and, as far back as could be placed, in the *Ghibber Gunyah*, lay extended their bed of dried sheep-skins on the sandy floor. Close to the entrance, Beck's double-barrelled fowling-piece was placed upright against one of the sides. Their saddles also were inside, and several nearly empty bags. Besides these articles, the fire showed nothing within their desolate habitation; but the old farm bull-dog, Cæsar, was lying at Beck's feet.

The black's person was strangely altered from its usual neat trim, although only so short a time had elapsed since he gave himself up to be an outlawed man: the blue jacket he usually wore lay where it had been placed the night before to serve as part of a pillow; and he stood by the fire with folded arms in his monkey-jacket. Morgan Brown, on the other hand, appeared very little changed; but sat on a piece of rock he had rolled near the fire, ıoking his short pipe and making remarks, and even cracking

jokes at intervals to his unheeding comrade. His last subject had been the amusement he felt in consideration of Lieutenant Bracton's having lost "horse, saddle, and rider, all at a go."

"Hold your noise," exclaimed Beck. "Hark! They're coming. I can hear the horses on the stones."

At the same instant, too, the bull-dog heard them; for he sprang to his feet, and, running hastily to the further side of the fire, stood still for an instant gazing through the thick darkness, and then with a single growl rushed baying away through the rushes towards the entrance of the basin. As he did so, the black flung himself fiercely round on his heel, and sprang and seized his piece; turned, erected himself, poised the gun, and waited. The rushes ceased to move and rustle, and the dog rose on to a little bit of ridgy ground beyond. The sharp crack of a gun startled the silence, and was closely followed by sharp wild yelps of agony, as the poor dog ran madly forward, then suddenly staggered, and rolled over and over. Beck, letting the gun drop till the butt rested on the ground, without so much as moving his body, stood puffing away the smoke which the wind bore back into his face, as quietly as if it were only the wreath from his comrade's pipe.

"What did you do that for?" exclaimed the stockman, as he sprang up.

"To save your worthless carcass from going to Norfolk Island," replied the black, in a tone of quiet nonchalance: "which same I wouldn't do," he continued, "but for sake of my own."

"Humph!" said the stockman; "and what harm was the dog doing you?"

"He should have stopped where he was well off, for one thing," said the black: "there's no ration to spare for him here; and, for another, he shouldn't talk so loud in an empty house: some of these times we shall have the people hearing what he says as they go by. Besides," he added sneeringly, "as he'd a mind to sing, I'd a mind to make him dance. Now, mate!"

The last words were uttered with that steady, collected tone of defiance which bespeaks man's determination to be guided by no will but his own. The stockman made no reply. But other voices were now heard coming through the darkness, from about the spot where the dog fell: one of them was evidently speaking in anger; the other's tone was that of a peacemaker. Then came the snort of a horse: whose footfalls, however, were not heard on the soft and swampy sod. Then was heard Dubbo's voice:—

"Ye's are amusing yourselves nicely to-night, lads. What had the poor dog been doing that he's to camp there to-night?"

The black gave a surly laugh, but made no verbal reply: but the laugh had not all the defiance in it that his answer to Morgan had displayed. The shame of a second thought too late taken was discoverable in it, as well as in a momentary sidelong look.

"Ye's'll be sorry for that yet," proceeded Dubbo, as he rode up closer to the fire, in company with Warraghi, both of them holding bundles of some size before them on the pommels of their saddles.

"It's what I call a real unmanly action. There's never a bad turn done but another comes for it. That's some of your precious work, Coolarama."

"It's none of my work," said Brown. "It's Blueskin's, there."

Dubbo looked at the black. "I thought you were more of a man."

"Well, you see I ain't," said Beck, doggedly. "Jump off, and let's see what you've got."

The stronger sympathies which bound the confederates together, stifled the momentary antipathy that had arisen between the two most forcible spirits. The bundles furnished more blankets, tea, sugar, flour, tobacco, salt, and some powder. Provided with the latter, with which he was as yet but scantily supplied, Beck could at any time bring down a beast in the contiguous bush, and supply himself with meat. A small cask for salting down a portion was to be the carriage of a future day, or rather night.

Beck had deeply ruminated over his position. Whilst he remained ignorant that there was a warrant out against him, he was content to conceal himself within the colony till it became safe for him to re-appear; but now that he knew an actual process of the criminal courts was commenced against him, he felt his only security was in escaping to some other country. The money he had in Lieutenant Bracton's hands was but little: but he knew that the sums he had from time to time lodged in one of the banks were now no longer his, except at risks it was not safe to run. He knew no one to whom he felt inclined as yet to entrust the attempt to withdraw the money for him; and to make the attempt personally was out of the question. He was quite aware that Mr. Hurley, knowing that he possessed cash thus lodged, would make it his first business to apprise the managers of the bank, and through their co-operation endeavour to entrap him. Like great numbers of the Australian youths, who, nevertheless, do not follow a seafaring life professionally, he was a tolerably good sailor; and he conceived the idea, when the summer months came round, of seizing one of the small coasters which often lie quite unprotected in some one or other of the little harbours south of Sydney: amassing, in the mean time, whatever money he could by any means secure. Such, in fact, was his only chance; unless he had chosen to go through the ordeal of a trial at the bar of the criminal court: he felt sure that, if the Myals had given information of the suggestions he had made to them to seize the sheep, there would be a reward offered for his apprehension. But his most threatening difficulty was the possibility that Warraghi or Dubbo, being in trouble about cattle hereafter, might secure their own safety at the expense of his. His visitors had now to inform him that it was known at the Rocky Springs and throughout the country round, from the declarations of the blacks themselves, that he had instigated them to commit the outrage; Mr. Hurley's attempt also to secure Brown, on the night of their escape, hung before his mind like the veil that conceals some mysterious object of terror from

the eye. He felt that he must go on: that he must get rid of fear by resolve: that he must counteract the plans of others for his destruction by attacks on them yet more direct, more sweeping, more resolute. Any little hesitation there was in his mind passed away on hearing the tidings brought by his visitors.

His next point was to persuade Dubbo and Warraghi to join him; otherwise they, if taken into custody, might give information where he was. With Warraghi he was successful: but Dubbo, a clear-witted, off-hand "Jack-Keen," was alike proof against persuasion and threat; and, after hearing all Beck had to say, and satisfying himself that both barrels of the piece were unloaded, mounted his horse, and, remarking that he meant to have another chance for it himself, laid his spur to his horse's side, and rode quickly away. Warraghi remained.

That night, therefore, the gang had a third member. It may seem surprising that such things can be done in so reckless a way. Yet such is the actual character of the felon population:—a word —a whisper—a whim—often suffices to decoy them into dangerous positions, which carry them further on through the impetus of their own down-hill tendency, and eventually involve loss of liberty and life.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Reuben Kable as Overseer—"The Kiddy"—Yoking Bullocks—Discipline, Decision, and Fair Play—Turn of Affairs—The Stolen Cattle Found—Misunderstanding—Adieux.

Reuben Kable, the morning after Mr. Bracton's acceptance of his offer to try his hand upon the turbulent mass of human character at the huts, was afoot long before sunrise—his usual custom; and, contrary to custom, occupying himself with other persons' affairs. The first sunbeams were gilding the summit of the distant mountain, and stray beasts of the milking herd coming within sight of the homestead, lowing in answer to the impatient bleating of their calves in the calfpen at the stockyard, when one of the earliest risers and heaviest smokers at the big hut, who had risen to enjoy his morning whiff, went out, after lighting his pipe and putting together the lumps of live charcoal he had stirred from under the ashes, to get some wood from the heap in front of the hut door.

"There's that long native," he said, aloud, as he returned and threw down an armful of fuel on the hearth, "driving up the working bullocks. I wonder what he wants with them."

The bullock-driver who had taken the Welshman's place, threw the blanket off his head in an instant, and started up on his elbow.

"I shouldn't wonder but the cove's lent him the team, Kiddy;

and you're going up to his station with him," continued the smoker.

Kiddy was a Londoner—a St. Giles's bird—up to everything: particularly to everything that concerned himself; and with that instinct which jealousy of their own interests invests men with, he immediately divined that he was not going up to the native's station, but going to be made to do his work just where he was, a little more diligently than for some days back he had been doing. In another minute he was out of bed, and standing in the chimney, in his ragged shirt fluttering like a ship in the glory of all the flags, making his observations through the chinks between the slabs. The bullocks were now coming over the hill at the back of the hut.

"He hasn't got the right ones," said the Kiddy, after peering through for an instant; "he's got that 'Young Drummer,' that wont be yoked."

"Wont be yoked?" retorted the first speaker, thinking no more about the long native in the rising inclination to chaff the cockney: "wont let *you* yoke him, you mean. How did Mr. Beck yoke him—and the Welshman?"

"Ah, well, lad," rejoined the Kiddy, coming out of the chimney and beginning to dress himself; "you'll see. If he goes to yoke that bullock, he'll horn him, as sure as——"

At this instant a heavy stone came bang against the slabs of the chimney, the smoke rising from which had indicated to the new overseer that some of them in the bullock-driver's hut were up; and, after allowing just time enough to fix attention, it was followed by a hail: for the bullocks were now passing quite close.

"Hoy!—send the bullock-driver up to the yard: is he going to lay a-bed all day?"

Cockneys, be it observed, make the very best of bullock-drivers; and they are perfectly sensible of it. There is no sham about them: they know what they mean themselves, and see a clear way to their own ends. If they mean to coax a bullock, they do coax him; if they mean to flog, the bullocks (who understand it most miraculously well) take the hint immediately. It was, therefore, in a mood in which sulkiness and indignation about equally mingled, that the Kiddy finished lacing his boots, threw on his straw hat, took his whip, and obeyed the summons. By this time all the rest of the men were awake: some speculating on this assumption of authority on the farm by the long native, others chaffing the Kiddy for being the first object of its exercise. It was not many seconds after the Kiddy went out, before the chimney was again occupied as a post of observation.

"Oh, I'll be hanged," exclaimed the look-out, "if the Kiddy and him isn't having a regular blow-up!"

"What is it?" asked several.

"So far as I can see," replied the first speaker, "he wants that young bullock yoked; and—hark! d'ye hear the Kiddy swearing now?"

All was hushed in the hut instantly. The angry and profane vociferations of the Kiddy could be heard to the syllable; and when they paused, the round, steady tones of the native were as distinctly heard in reply. They sounded as if he were mingling persuasion and command—good-tempered reasoning with determined authority; but every time the Kiddy spoke, his voice subsided more and more from its first pitch into one of dogged sullenness.

"He's going to try to yoke him," said the look-out.

"Who is?"

"Kiddy. But he doesn't mean it; for he's put Young Drummer for a near-side bullock. He knows very well he can't yoke him there. My word, the native's flash to him, though: he's telling him to put Young Drummer on the off side."

"Well?"

"Oh! Kiddy wont. He keeps gammoning to try to yoke him where he is. Whew!—My word, that's a rum 'un."

"What?" shouted all, as they rushed into the chimney in a mass, to look.

"Why; the native went up and laid hold of the yoke with his left hand to take it off the bullock's neck again; and you see he gave Kiddy a push away with his right elbow, and Drummer, when Kiddy came against his flank, lifted up his foot, and sent him spinning."

The assembled group were just in time to hear Reuben Kable, when he saw the man was not seriously hurt, say, "That serves you just right, my chap!" and to see him proceed to draw back from their necks the long, heavy bar of wood used for yoking oxen together. As he did so, the vicious and yet only half-broken-in animal made an effort to fulfil the bullock-driver's prophecy, and horn Reuben under the arm: but he was too wary, and stood rather too tall for the operation. In acknowledgment of the intention, Reuben took the yoke by one end, and with both hands swung it back, and brought it to bear upon the animal's ribs with a sound that might have justified Drummer losing the last syllable of his name. The astonished brute flung his head up into the air, and away he dashed round the inside of the fence, looking back aghast ever and anon as he ran, until he got into the farthest angle of the yard. As the commanding figure of man again approached him, without relinquishing the weapon of his punishment, the affrighted beast looked every way for an outlet: but there was none; so, dashing round the remaining sides of the yard, he got back to his "pal," and pushing inside him next the fence, took his proper place on the off-side.

In ten minutes more, Reuben had yoked the yoke-bullocks and harnessed the shafter, driven them out of the yard, and brought them to the front of the big hut, beside which, it being the bullock-driver's residence, the dray stood. Kiddy, now much better morally, whatever he might be physically, after the kick on the hip, assisted to put them to: still there was an indication on

his countenance and in his manner, that he meant to be as "awkward" as he dared.

The Australian looked round. All the hut doors were now open, and the hands up; those from the other huts had mostly gathered about the big one. They were going on much as usual;—standing smoking with folded arms, or grinding their knives; and three or four of the most inveterate gamblers, unable to wait for their favourite amusement even till after breakfast, were busily engaged at "pitch and hustle" at the old spot, where the store secured them from the immediate observation of the inmates of the cottage: the Australian could not have had a better opportunity.

"Go and get a load of wood for the cottage," he said, addressing the Kiddy, "it will be breakfast-time by when you have done that; and then, after breakfast, I'll tell you what to do next."

"He'll tell him what to do," muttered one to another. "Did you hear that? What has he got to do with us?"

"And," said the Australian, as his reluctant pupil drove off, "take your axe with you, and lop off some of those half-dry gum-heads that are lying about, and bring them in along with the dry wood. That dry wood burns too quick away by itself in a grate. And don't chuck it down so close to the cottage; lay it a little further up this way."

"I want a word with you, my lads," proceeded Reuben, as he turned round and faced the whole mob, who were by this time gathering in general conclave some paces behind him. "You wonder at what I'm doing, I see. There's nothing wonderful about it. I believe I am the oldest friend your master has in this colony: it was by me he was directed to this very land, when he was seeking for a farm, on his arrival. But I little imagined who he had for an overseer all this time: if I had, things would not have been in the state they are now, I assure you. By-the-bye, which of you is the man that's still left here out of the lot Beck hired in Sydney, when he was coming up as overseer first?"

"That's him," said one or two, pointing.

"I'm the man," said a tall, smooth-looking north-of-Ireland man, very cleanly, and even precisely dressed, but with hypocrite and sycophant written in every feature and attribute.

"I'll get you an order to march as soon as I've had my breakfast," said Reuben. "Pray what work have you done since you've been here? But there, there—I don't want to know."

"If I didn't know this Beck's character, men," he proceeded, again addressing the group, "I should think I did very wrong to speak ill of him behind his back: but I do know it. I wish to wrong no man: I should be sorry to wrong any of you by forming a harsh opinion of him. But there can be no manner of doubt that everything about this place has got into a very queer state: except, indeed, the workmanship. Beck is a good workman; but you know very well he has spoiled the hands—ay, and, for all I know, corrupted some of them. Pray, did none of you know of his instigating the blacks to seize the sheep?"

"No," said one and all.

"Well, let that pass. The point I want to come to is this:—I have told Mr. Bracton that I'll act as his overseer for some time to come. Now, all I want is—what you know very well is right—for every man to do his work like a man. And, by jingo, I'll have it so. Now, I'll put it to yourselves whether there's a master about this part of the country pays his men more like a gentleman than Mr. Bracton."

"No," answered some: "pays very well."—"The money's always coming when it is earned," replied others.

"Well; and now will you tell me where there's a master at this time that's worse treated? Here's his property destroyed wholesale. You seem just to work when you like, and play when you like; and two poor defenceless young girls and a grey-headed woman are handed over to those black cannibals as if they were dog's meat. Why, hang such a set of men!"

"We knew nothing about it," exclaimed one, who saw the inlet to the spokesmanship, putting himself forward.

"You may say that *now*, Mr. Orator: but you couldn't say it with your overseer standing at your head. I'm speaking of the whole concern. You know Beck deserves nothing short of hanging; and he'll get it yet, if I'm not sorely out in my calculation. And you know you're not acting like men either. You ought to be ashamed of yourselves. Still, there's some likely-looking chaps among you: there must be *some* good 'uns, I think. However, we shall see that. Now, just take and turn over a new leaf, and begin again. Act every one of you the same as he'd wish his man to act by him, supposing he were a master himself. What is that you want to say, Mr. Orator? I see you can hardly keep it. Out with it!"

"I was only going to say, sir," said the unfortunate wight, thus a second time pinned, "as we've had nobody to tell us what to do this week: the master doesn't interfere."

"Doesn't interfere! Here's a fine old fellow that's been fighting his country's battles from when he was a boy till he grew grey-headed; and because he's been too hard at work at that to learn the ins-and-outs of a farm, you put upon him in this way. Why, man, you can't know what you're talking about. You never could mean that for an excuse. But I'll give you a bit of advice: don't you be a Philadelphia lawyer any longer. Swear against it. It always shows the man that's afraid of work. I'll bet a wager, if it could be proved, that many a time when you were lying snoozing in your mother's lap, cutting your teeth, Lieutenant Bracton was at sea in a gale of wind, or superintending the working of a gun, to keep you there. What a sensible fellow you must be to try to gammon us that there's reason in that for your skulking when he's paying you your wages—the very money he was earning at the time? Everybody must do something, men. I don't think I get ten days' holidays in a year; and who is there among you but gets as much as that!"

"Ay, but you're your own master, sir," retorted one. "You earn a great deal more than we can by our work, sir," urged another. "Well," said a third, "I'm quite willing to work; but you must allow, sir, that the farm's been in a very bad state:" and so on. But the end was accomplished. A plain exposition of the common sense of the matter, and the simple and direct appeal to the men's sense of equity, had done what all the police magistrate's threats of the courts had only urged into a more hopeless case. This is pretty much the way in which the native colonists generally deal with their men; and (as may be supposed) successfully.

"Now we understand one another, you know," concluded Reuben Kable, "after this yarn. Every man that hires, hires to do what he can do as a fair thing; not to go beyond his ability, and not to fall short of it. His employer, you observe, calculates what his labour's worth by looking at him, and expects him, of course, to turn out according to his looks: there's no other way of judging what wages he's worth. But if that man does not do what he can do in fairness, why it's just as scamping an action as it would be for his employer to take and pay him with bad money. It 'll be breakfast time now. After breakfast I'll set you to work. And when you get into the hut, if you find there's ever a man among you that wants to turn you from doing what you know is manly and right, just take and kick him out of the hut, and chuck his quart-pot and blanket after him. I'll stand between you and the law in any such case. Never let some no-man scamp, that's not worth his salt, lead a whole hutful of good men astray: always bundle him out."

The men turned towards their huts, almost all gratified at the position the last half-hour had brought things into: conciliated, energized, and even flattered, by the appeal so properly made to their higher sentiments: most of them with gestures of obeisance.

Mr. Bracton heard with some degree of surprise, when, after breakfast, he proposed to Mr. Kable to go with him to the hands and induct him into his position, that the business was already settled thus far; and that it only remained for himself now to take advantage of the arrangement, by being as much as possible in the company of his new overseer when going his rounds; and thus, by conversation on each particular of the business as it was being transacted, form opinions and plans of his own for future use. The effects on the farm itself were immediately discernible. There were no longer any loungers to be seen about; and the commencement of new work showed at once that the standing strength of hands for ordinary occupations had been over, not under, what had been requisite. Every man's work was a full equivalent for his cost, and all were working away in high spirits and good humour.

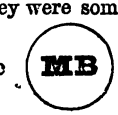
And thus matters went on day after day. Lieutenant Bracton found so much in the young Australian, which he admired and

sympathized with, that at times his manner toward him became very little distinguishable from his customary manner towards Willoughby. The ladies smiled as they remarked this to each other.

But there was still a sorrow: for in what circle of human experience, whether domestic or merely individual, is there not one? Miss Bracton's health still continued severely injured, and she was the pet of the family. If it went ill with her, it went ill with them all; and it always had been so. The present, however, was the first occasion on which any more than slight ailments of a day or so had been, through her, the source of discomfort to them. This was quite a new case: it was an illness for which no fee could find a medicament—a wound that only time (if even time itself) could heal. For a few hours a day she left her chamber, and visited the common apartments of the family, and sometimes for a short time walked in the garden; and told Reuben Kable where, last year, such and such of her flowery favourites had budded and blossomed, and perished away. But *they* would blossom again: life's flower—never: that buds but once; but once expands into the face of day; but once can die.

But Marianna, all the while she told the pensive moral of her flowers, was not aware how well it was understood. She supposed Reuben Kable knew that Mr. Hurley had been her suitor, but did not imagine that he was acquainted with the effect of her misunderstanding with her lover on her health. Yet often did a thrill of anguish for the brave but broken-hearted girl wring the young Australian's heart.

Everything on the farm, meantime, went on more and more satisfactorily every day. The experience and powers of Reuben Kable were directed upon their task by the strongest sentiments of the mind: he felt indignant at the gross wrong which he had suddenly discovered being done to a brave man; and the more especially so as it was the deed of one who had some sort of title to call himself a native of Australia. His admiration of Katharine, and sympathy with Marianna, also had both their effect; and the claim of the family on him through Willoughby, and even through his own sister, was not without its influence. For though he usually spoke bluntly to Mary, and carelessly about her, he in reality doated upon her as only a younger and only sister can be doated upon.

Reuben's sharp eye and practised judgment among cattle were not long in detecting Beck's malversation in regard to the herd. In his rides about the bush, he first observed a white heifer with a white calf, so exactly like a white cow in Lieut. Bracton's herd in every point of the breed, that he instinctively rode round them to look at the brand: for they were some miles away from the Rocky Springs. There was the  as he had expected; so

he drove them home along with him, and left them in the flat.

Again and again these

s turned up; so, still he gathered them back, as he supposed to the proper run. At length other MBs presented themselves: but it was a different sized brand from Lieut. Bracton's; and recollecting now that Morgan Brown and Martin Beck had these initials, he asked to be shown the farm brands. To his astonishment there was no circular brand among them. Nevertheless it was a moral certainty that the three white cattle were from the same stock. This led to an examination of others; and of yet more, till Reuben became quite convinced of the real state of things. What, however, his own judgment could not do was supplied, on the return of the Welshman, by his recollection of the young beasts themselves. Lieut. Bracton was therefore advised to have all these cattle gathered, from where they were found chiefly to lie, beyond Coolarama Creek, and to keep them with his own herd till a claimant should appear who could make out a better title to them.

The Welshman also had now returned; his ticket of leave was restored to him: Mr. Hurley's representation of the whole case to the Governor having sufficed to secure a remission of his sentence. And once more the time came round for the young ladies to detect Biddy in putting aside waste dainties of the larder as offerings to some mysterious idol. The stubborn but inflexibly upright Cambrian proved exactly what Reuben's insight of character had led him to predict. "She is something like a man," was the Welshman's expressed opinion of the Australian; "she know what to tell a man to do. I work under such a man as that till I am greyheaded, and never quarrel with her." And when it was explained to him how he might make himself most valuable in his new and unexpected office, he immediately entered into the spirit of the project, and adhered, sometimes with an amusing exactitude, to every instruction.

An entirely new disposition, moreover, appeared in the men at large: elevated by the incitement of their better feelings, and rebuked by Reuben's rigorous and resolute judgment of their past conduct, they perceived finally, what always effects a great deal, that they *must* give way; or, by persisting, injure themselves.

But to Reuben Kable the most satisfactory circumstance of all was the readiness with which Mr. Bracton transferred his standing and thorough knowledge of the government of men to its new use. He found, moreover, that Mr. Bracton, who was naturally a close observer, really needed but little information from him. The routine of the farm business had been going on so long before his eyes, that the only remaining requisite was confidence in the suggestions of his own judgment. And this once made clear to him, it was easily brought into force.

Thus, in the farm affairs and out of doors everything went on well. Not so within. Reuben, who had passed his whole life in the bush, knew very little of the heart of woman; consequently, as Katharine became daily more distant, and lost the cordial and familiar air she had at first exhibited, he never surmised that it was a necessary result of his own want of confidence and frankness. He quite forgot, or perhaps had never considered, that it is man's business first to express esteem and tenderness. The dogma clung to all he did and said, that the English lady had been so brought up that a dancing master would have a better chance of obtaining her regard than the blunt but sterling bushman. Before he would venture to declare his love to Katharine, Reuben wished to make sure that he should not be scorned; and every element of Katharine's nature shrank from acceding to this bold demand.

Meantime, unchecked by this disastrous misconception in his intercourse with Marianna; prizing her as the sister of his friend, and in all probability his near relative hereafter; touched by her sadness and broken health; stimulated to every kind attention by the peculiar frankness and fervour of her character, Reuben lavished upon her every courtesy and endearing attention within the regions of decorum; and Marianna, on her part, innocently and thankfully received the tokens of a sympathy so generous and exhilarating.

It is according to the laws of individual constitution that we judge of and appreciate matters of this kind: indeed, our judgment of them is often deeply tinged by the temporary state of the mind under passing circumstances. Marianna, with her feelings depressed by the fierce contention between her love for Mr. Hurley and her pride in the dignity of her sex, found nothing in the kind attentions of Reuben, sometimes serious, sometimes playful, but that consolation she felt herself entitled to. But Katharine, of a much more retiring character than her cousin, and viewing the matter from her own position, could not comprehend why Reuben should be so cordial, friendly, and attentive to Marianna, yet distant, cautious, and frigid to her; unless he had a preference for Marianna.

This little misunderstanding availed no further at first than to render Katharine more shy and distant, and Reuben more hesitating and serious; but, at length, a little incident occurred which led Katharine into much graver misconception. Rachael, ever Mr. Hurley's friend, and observant of the pleasure which Marianna derived from the young Australian's sympathy, one day ventured to remind her friend of the absent one, by playfully contrasting her feelings towards him and towards her new acquaintance.

"We shall have Charlie here by-and-by," Marianna had been remarking; "and I shall be so glad. He wont run away from us like Willoughby. Besides, he's worth ten or a dozen Wil-

loughbys. Willoughby's such a dunderhead. He says, in about eighteen months more he shall be done. Oh! and what do you think he says about you?"

"I really can't tell, Miss Bracton," said Rachael. "I was not aware that I had authorized him to say anything."

"Oh, but I have, Rachael, you know; and that's the same. I told him you were anxiously expecting him."

"Surely not, Marianna?" said Rachael, reproachfully.

"Well, perhaps not quite all that; but I told him not to have any sweetheart in England, but wait till he gets here. And if he happened to have one, to be sure and make up some excuse and get rid of her."

"For shame, Marianna! How would you like to be got rid of with an excuse? What did your brother say?"

"Oh, he says he has no such thing as a sweetheart among all his property. (Oh! see how she smiles!) And he says he shall be very obliged to me for furnishing him with one, for he is so tired of dead subjects that he shall be most happy to transfer his studies to a living one—especially if possessing a pair of fine black eyes."

"Oh, Marianna! it was really very wrong of you."

"Not at all. I am so curious to see how you and Charlie will behave to one another; I shall know all your secrets from him, and all his from you. Besides the fun of leaving you by yourselves in the parlour some evening, and listening at the keyhole and hearing him call you his 'little Jewess,' '*sweet* little Jewess.'"

"Your brother, Marianna, will know how to behave himself much better than that."

"Ah! you're not initiated. Wait a bit."

"And you!" retorted Rachael. "Mr. Hurley, I suppose, is quite forgotten."

"Of course," said Marianna;—"I never think about him now."

"You ought, then, my dear."

"What! when Reuben watches for everything I want, and can hear every word I speak wherever he's looking, or whoever he's talking to! Nay, now Rachael, I don't think so. Friendship is friendship, let it come from whom it may."

"You treat Mr. Hurley very ill, Marianna," said Rachael, almost angrily.

"Well, well," said the perverse girl, now rather nettled at Rachael's tone, "I'll make up for it, my dear Miss Moses, by treating Mr. Kable all the better."

The young ladies were about to go to the apartment where Katharine was already sitting with Mr. and Mrs. Bracton and Reuben. Rachael had made no reply to Marianna's last remark, and thus stimulated her vexation.

"Come," said the Australian, as she entered; and he shook up and smoothed the light cushion of the chair by the fireside which Katharine had vacated for her.

"You are my kindest friend, Reuben," said Marianna empha-

tically: "kinder every day." And full well did Marianna know the art of putting that telling emphasis into sentences which makes them mean so much more than the mere words express.

Even Rachael herself now felt a conviction that Marianna did mean to forget Mr. Hurley; and that she had held her love in abeyance by her pride so long that it had forsaken her: full of affections as she knew her friend to be, it seemed to her that they now naturally clustered themselves around a fresh object, so amply calculated to attract them. Katharine did not investigate the cause; but the fact pressed itself upon her belief exactly as it did upon Rachael's. Rachael's eyes and Katharine's met, and then poor Katharine was sure. "Rachael sees it," she thought, "as well as I."

From this hour Katharine shrank more and more within herself. Her manner, indeed, could not be greatly altered, for it had never infringed the limits of the most unsullied and lovely bashfulness; but when at times her first unguarded frankness occurred to her recollection, the uneasiness it gave rise to brought out a preciseness and decision of deportment, as foreign to her habitual taste in domestic intercourse as it was calculated still further to repress the advances of Reuben.

Thus the course of things went on, by the impetus given to them from day to day, till the entire month had glided by: the Australian, full of admiration for the young lady, but more and more convinced that she repaid it only by the coldest respect; Katharine, soothed and delighted with the pure sentiments and clear understanding of Reuben, but perplexed and chilled by the proud caution which had been infused into his manner.

The preponderating effect on the whole was, that the peculiar trait of the Australian's mind went on to chill and repress Katharine, and by its reaction to mislead still further himself. Reuben had thought that, when the parting day came, he should have, and would seize, the opportunity of uttering one proud hopeless word of acknowledgment of his intense admiration of the loveliness of Katharine. But Katharine also had preconcerted her part. She had loved him more and more, and she felt she had almost too nearly betrayed it already: so when she saw his horse being led from the stable, she hastily entered the parlour, and pleading business, abruptly bade Reuben good-day, leaving his final entertainment to her relatives.

Perhaps there is nothing so difficult for a man to understand as the delicacy of a sensitive and unsullied female spirit; as women, on their part, cannot comprehend the absorbing enthusiasm with which man mingles and shares in the operations of some stupendous conflict. No surmise could be more distant from the Australian's thoughts than that this abrupt leave-taking was really the veil to hide a poignant agony.

He went away with a much sadder spirit than he came; but he knew, with his practical good sense, that to struggle against the insuperable is only to make bad worse. A wise submission

inevitable circumstances was as inherent and leading an attribute of Reuben's character as it was of Katharine's. They had both grown up in orphanage; and this is the orphan's first lesson. Katharine, after the anguish of the hour was got over, betook herself to her household duties; Reuben Kable rode steadily and silently on towards the Pass in the Warraghong Mountains.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Willoughby's return—Katharine's infancy—"The Daisy" as hostess—The Bractons at Brisbane Water—Reuben's return—Adieux.

THE gray-looking days of the July winter of Australia had set in, and the moderately-cold breezes of that season blew fresh and half tempestuous up from the South Seas, when the early risers of Sydney connected with mercantile affairs, whose first glance in the morning when they have hurried through the empty streets to a point of observation is ever towards the signal-post, discerned the signal for a homeward-bound whaler flying. On this occasion, however, the professional had been beforehand with the non-professional observers; and already a fine-looking Englishman, deep-tanned as a Mulatto, seated in the stern of his tight pilot boat, was far out from the shore, with a wild-looking crew of half-naked New Zealanders pulling him gaily and hardily along the hills and hollows of the main, direct for the vessel. That day, about twelve o'clock, the *Harponier*, deep-laden, her hull almost buried in the water, was silently and heavily picking her way by the deepest channels to her anchorage.

Willoughby's first voyage had turned out a most auspicious one: "the fish," as the sailors said, "came to look after the ship. There was no need to keep a look-out for them." Everything that would hold a gallon of oil was full; and the vessel itself was crammed with almost more than it was safe to sail her with. However, the crew had been given to understand by the skipper that it was an old trick of his to leave nothing behind which he could carry away; and as they saw he could do with four hours below out of the twenty-four, and wasn't afraid to put his own hand to a rope, they concluded it was best to have no grumbling; especially as it made good, after all, for their own "lays." And now, the ship coming into port, and all safe, every man was in rare good humour. The captain, in secret prospect of soon seeing the "Daisy of the Bay," being the happiest man aboard.

But Willoughby's pleasure did not long remain unimpaired. One of the partners of the firm told him, in the course of the afternoon, of the serious losses Lieutenant Bracton had had; and

further of his having heard that one of the young ladies had been for some time in very bad health. That same evening, after posting a letter to his family, Willoughby found one of his old acquaintances among the Broken Bay fleet just about to run down the harbour; and by sunrise the next morning, he was at the cottage door at Brisbane Water. Mary had not expected him for two months to come; but it was one of those welcome disappointments which are so easily got over; and, very probably, Mary had something else than the disappointment to think about just at the minute.

And now, as soon as Mary could become disengaged, she proceeded to inform Willoughby of all the changes that had taken place at the Morrumbidgee. Marianna and Mr. Hurley, she thought, must have had a quarrel, for poor Marianna was this long time ill, and she never heard anything now about Mr. Hurley. The overseer had turned out one of the greatest villains alive; and Reuben had been the means of rescuing the ladies quite providentially from the blacks: but all was now going on well; only Katharine's last letter seemed so sad and desponding that she couldn't make it out. She was in hopes Katharine and Reuben (but this to Willoughby only—no one else was ever to hear a syllable about it, he must mind that) would have taken a fancy to one another: "but," said Mary, "this is the way people do about love, you see" (looking archly), "always loving when they're not wanted, and thinking nothing of those who would make much of them. Well, perhaps, after all, Katharine is right: it is better to be an old man's darling than a young man's slave. Why do you laugh? Do you think I don't mean it?" Of course there was but one answer that the young man *could* make.

But steadily as Willoughby had pursued his own business during the prosperous times of his family—seeming, indeed, almost to forget them in the new circle of affections he had entered—these tidings troubled him deeply; and, explaining to the affectionate and considerate girl the unhappiness and anxiety he felt, he expressed a wish to see his relatives without delay. Mary entered into his feelings without any dash of selfish consideration; and offered her horse, which was running idle in the bush, to expedite his return to Sydney to take the mail: but she must make this bargain,—that he would try to get his family to come back with him and pay her a visit. To this Willoughby willingly consented, and by next evening he was again back on the borders of the capital. His temporary absence was easily arranged with his owners, as the vessel was not to begin to unload for a few days; and a rapid journey once more terminated in his arrival among the associates of his childhood.

The old gentleman was still the same solid substance as ever. At times he was evidently much depressed by the wavering health of his daughter; though generally he was cheerful out of doors and had become quite a man of business. There was also a degree

of uneasiness and anxiety sometimes discernible in his manner when Katharine fell under his notice: as if he thought something ailed her, yet could not discover sufficient indications to render him sure. Katharine was a great favourite: her father had died the death of a brave man, "in fierce Mahratta battle," and his brother, then only a midshipman, had never forgotten him. When he had brought the orphan babe to his future wife, and made his appeal in the infant's behalf, it was the cordial and touching tenderness with which the young lady (then living alone with her widowed mother) accepted the charge, that unalterably sealed his attachment to her. And for a long time, year after year, before they were married, the little Katharine was to them an object of mutual affection; filling them with a common delight, uniting them in a common duty, and linking their hearts together inseparably till, as they sat together and looked down upon her as she slept, it would have startled them to have been suddenly reminded that she was not their own offspring.

His sister's indisposition did not move Willoughby so deeply as it had done at first; for he soon elicited the important fact that Mr. Hurley was, in all probability, still as much attached to her as ever; and that Marianna was only ill because she would be so. The young sailor's homely advice to her, was to "write her lover a letter of apology, and turn into her berth with a clear conscience." But this brought the discussion to a very abrupt termination. Mr. Willoughby Bracton was informed,—"That it was very well for him to assume to know all about ropes, and spars, and blocks, and all the rest of the tackle aboard ship; but he might depend upon it that he was very incompetent to give a lady at all tolerable advice how to preserve the status of her sex from the thoughtless and wanton encroachments of his own." However, either the pleasure of her brother's visit, or the tenacity with which his advice clung to her mind, had a very beneficial influence on Miss Bracton's health; for, though she still continued querulous, and physically far from well, her manner became much more energetic and spirited, and like to what it formerly had been.

Mrs. Bracton was much as usual; and so also, to Willoughby, seemed Katharine: he could discern none of the melancholy Mary had inferred from her letter. She seemed rather more pallid, and had become more serious; but the change did not strike him as remarkable, considering her long and incessant attention to Marianna, and the gravity of the annoyance to which the family had been subjected in his absence. To Mary Kable's proposal the ladies offered no objections, beyond such as people are apt to make at first to a novelty which they have really not taken into their consideration: at length it came to be merely a question whether Mary's invitation could be accepted without unbecoming intrusion upon her brother; which Willoughby, who knew Reuben's simple habits and kind disposition, assured them need be no obstacle whatever. Punctilio, however, was not to be satisfied with-

out further assurance; and to settle the point therefore, Willoughby rode over to Reuben's station and saw him. The young Australian was too sincerely pleased with the family not to feel heartily gratified at the opportunity of thus assisting the recovery of Miss Bracton's health, promoting the enjoyment of his sister, manifesting his continued regard to his friend, and—if that must even be all—seeing Katharine once more. The arrangement, therefore, was at once concluded upon; and, soon after Willoughby's return, carried into effect. The old gentleman himself remained at home, not inclining to leave the farm so soon after its reduction into a state of order, and Willoughby drove his mother and sisters down to the capital.*

And now, if ever Willoughby had reason to feel proud of the choice he had made, this was the hour. Mary's face beamed out into a perfect radiance of beauty, such as he had never seen it wear before, as she welcomed her friends, and went on busily to minister to their comfort: indeed, it is the law of the beauty of the spirit, that it never shines forth in its full radiance till it has forgotten its own existence in the joy of blessing others. This fragrant wild flower, that had grown in solitude on the lonely margin of the bay, bade fair to rival, if not surpass, the more cultured sister and cousin of Willoughby: he saw with a bounding heart that Mrs. Bracton's gaze at times settled steadfastly upon the Australian maid, as if by an irresistible attraction.

It was a sunny afternoon when the visitors arrived. Everything was novel which their delighted hostess had to show to them. There was a circumstance, too, that Willoughby must have been a dullard if he could have failed to observe and dwell upon. In showing her visitors over the house and all around it, Mary evidently took pains, by referring to him, to show that Willoughby was as much at home there as she was herself: that he was, in a certain sense, master there as she was mistress. Indeed, Mary did not even omit to intimate, that *if* she should *happen* ever to get married, Reuben meant to resign this farm to her entirely, and settle up the country, to be near his cattle.

Of such days the evening soon comes. With perhaps a little headache from the unwonted excitement, Mary comfortably settled her friends in their apartments, and stole back to the parlour.

"You bring me everything, my Willoughby—first yourself, and last such a treat as this: and how many scores of presents in the mean time? And now tell me about this Sydney news," she added, giving her hand in apologetic acknowledgment of not having listened with proper attention to some communication he had made at an earlier period of the day. "You know I could not attend properly to what you said whilst I was engaged with

* Going to Sydney is always spoken of as going *down*, when the journey takes place from the interior—as going *up*, when along the coast.

your mother and sisters:" for Mary seemed of late to take great pains to include Katharine in the same category with Marianna, emphatically calling both his sisters when speaking about them to Willoughby.

"Well, Mary, I don't know that I can add anything to what you already know. The owners, I imagine, like the state they find the ship and the hands in; and, of course, they're well pleased with such a cargo in such a short time. It would pass muster very well if I'd made a twelvemonth's voyage of it: so, as there'll soon be a share in the ship that they must either buy for the firm, or let it go into the hands of some other purchaser, they offer to secure it for me."

"And will you be able to buy it? I can help you, you know, when Reuben comes down the country; or we can send up to him, and hasten him, if there's any need of it."

"No, darling; that's not necessary: the funds I have in the bank, along with my share in the oil, will do it—or nearly so. The difference, at all events, whatever oil is fetching, will be so little that they'll make it right, on my bill, for the sum without demur."

"Well, that's all very nice. But now tell me about dear Katharine: you can't think how it frets me to see her so. What can it be? You see how different she is from what she was when I saw her first."

"There's nothing the matter with her, Polly, depend upon it: she's only fagged with waiting on Marianna so long, and depressed by the shock of terror from those black wretches. Kate always takes a long time to come round: she lays anything of the sort so to heart. Marianna's nature instinctively endeavours to get rid of trouble by wildness and license; but poor Kate goes just the opposite way to work. She labours after a deeper patience; and thus she has both the original trouble and her own struggle with herself to sustain at once. That is as I imagine it to be: she is not only submitting, but trying to make herself submit, without a murmur."

"And very good of her, Willoughby?" said Mary inquiringly, looking up in his face; for she was no theologian: at least she had often to appeal to higher authority, lest she should be avowing that which was unorthodox.

"No; very silly," said Willoughby. "One thing at a time is quite enough. No man expects his horse to stand still when he's spurred."

"But what should she do then?"

"Why, receive the stroke from the hand above in all meekness: but, even more cheerfully still, pursue amended ways."

"Now, I must just tell you, Willoughby, that you're wrong about Katharine: for that is just what she has said herself in her letter, and partly again to-day; so that she cannot be doing as you say. It must be something else. Oh dear, I wish I could find it out!"

"I tell you, there's nothing the matter with her. But you girls are always sentimental."

"Very well, Willoughby; have your own way."

"And you'll have yours?"

"Yes."

"So you shall, in anything I can help you to secure it in. Mind you must get ready for Reuben in three or four days at the utmost."

"Ah, he always says he's coming before he does: he likes to have everything ready for him when he does come. He'll be here about this day week."

The accommodations for visitors of the softer sex in such a cottage as that possessed by the Kables, though it had been rebuilt since their parents' death, were very limited. The young hostess was, therefore, necessitated to apportion her own and her brother's rooms between her visitors; and, quartering herself upon Margaret, leave Willoughby and Reuben, on the return of the latter, "to toss up for which should have the sofa and which the hearth-rug:" unless either of them chose to go into a room where there was another sofa but no fire.

Katharine seemed to have had allotted to her the plainest apartment in the house; but it was roomy, and fresh as if the pure air were seldom, by day, or night, debarred of free ingress through the window: which still, as if by an oversight, stood open. Order reigned throughout its whole arrangements like a presiding spirit: on some hanging book-shelves there were a few books; and on the table, as if far more frequently resorted to than the rest, lay the solemn Legend of the Saints. Reuben's name was written in it in his own handwriting; broad, square, and plain as print itself.

Katherine knew Reuben's history pretty well; and had often wondered—never considering that our minds make us, not we them—how, with so little instruction, he had come to develope his powers into such a systematic and vigorous understanding. And now another problem arose—of what sect might he be in religion? In vain she resorted again to the shelves. That one great doctrinary which lay upon the table was all there was to bear witness of his creed—"A Christian!" thought Katharine, "no more, and no less." And as her eyes wandered yet further round the room, the attestation presented itself that, if such were indeed Reuben's principle, it was no wild vaunt to escape from the shackles of any church, into license and speculation; for beneath the chair, by the couch side, there was a plain cushion, such as those might care to have who forget not morning and evening orison.

An unspeakable peace diffused itself through her heart. She felt that their souls were living in a common element; breathing the atmosphere of the same immortality: bound, however destiny might separate them upon earth, to the one great home. And yet a painful thought would keep rising to dim the happy vision—

"Was it right of Reuben, after he knew from her of the situation of things between Mr. Hurley and Marianna;—was it right of him to pay such marked attentions to her cousin: evidently," Katharine thought, "such as were calculated to elicit from her, affection?" Of Marianna's share in the matter she would not, and did not, from the first, permit herself to think: she felt that if she did, and it turned out as she feared, she could not love her. Katharine preferred, in this matter, not to see the truth itself—if that truth were as she supposed—till it was inevitable; and hope suggested that, if ever it should indeed become so, habit would by that time have enabled her almost to blind herself to its impropriety. But some minds are instinctively truth-loving, even in the face of the bitterest anguish. Such was Katharine's; and all her self-control was not sufficient to prevent a question of the decorousness and integrity of Reuben's conduct from darting occasionally through her mind. But exactly as our own love is purest, do we excuse the offences of its object: exactly as we are more or less worthy, do we insist on believing those we love to be so. The leading moral attribute of Katharine's character therefore antagonized the intellectual, and at length overcame it. Whatever might be the extent of Reuben's offence she forgave it; happy in the thought that her prayers were ascending from the same spot as his had done. She seemed to feel safer too within his home; but she reasoned down the longings of a human heart for mortal affection by the thought that, after all, that was not the most high and glorious of the passions, but only a poor earthly type of that which is reserved for hereafter.

Again the morning sun shines bright on the smooth waters of the bay; again a busy little party surrounds the breakfast table in the front parlour, and the projected enterprises of the day undergo discussion—how voluminous discussion those will best comprehend who have most frequently sat with our fair fellow-creatures under like circumstances. But the upshot is that Willoughby means to do just whatever he is required to do: they "must settle it among themselves." Mrs. Bracton means to sit and rest herself after her journey (there being probably a little spice of vexation that the old gentleman is not here as the cause of the decision); Mary and Katharine mean (or rather Mary means, in virtue of both Katharine and herself) to go across through the bush, and see the improvements on Willoughby's ground—"and Miss Marianna, too, perhaps, will like to go—they will be very happy in her company" (a fib of Mary's), "but not, if she thinks it will be too tiring for her, as she is weakly." Finally, Marianna, who immediately penetrates the Daisy's thoughts, pronounces that she shall not go.

Thus passed on the time from day to day: Mrs. Bracton seemingly best pleased to sit and work, and look out upon the flashing surface of the bay, and occasionally vary the monotony by straying into and round about the buildings, Katharine

utterly monopolized by the hostess. Ah! she says, in reply to Katharine's remonstrances in her poor cousin's behalf, she can talk with Willoughby another time. But the Daisy never lets out a word, even to Katharine, about the *tête-à-têtes* they have after supper, when every one else has retired. Yet Katharine might almost surmise the fact from the singular resignation that the young sailor displays throughout the day. Marianna, who beneath her satire conceals a very loving disposition, and, in her heart, fully appreciates the freshness and sweetness of her intended sister-in-law's character, contents herself, by a sort of mute understanding with her cousin and her brother, in Mrs. Bracton's and Willoughby's company only; and yields, as much as her strength permits, to his appeals and remonstrances with her to be out of doors and about in the atmosphere of the salt water.

In the meantime, Mary little imagined what she was doing: she did not surmise how much she was promoting the tendency of Katharine's heart to domesticate itself there. When Katharine stopped suddenly amidst some wild or lovely scene in the bush, or lingered and spoke not, on the grassy waterside, or sat lost in thought in the rooms where the two retreated to be by themselves, Mary did not imagine what caused the sudden stop, the lingering, the abstraction. Perhaps Katharine herself even could not have told her. But this was it:—something within her whispered, "Katharine—this is thine home. Katharine—its owner is thine, too."

Willoughby at length informed the ladies that one of the boats had brought him a summons, on business connected with the ship's duties, to Sydney: it would be for them to decide whether to return with him or to remain longer. Urged by Mary's protestations against such an early departure, they concluded to remain a while longer.

A couple of evenings afterwards, as they all sat working after tea around a blazing fire, the latch of the back door was lifted, and the firm, deliberate step of Reuben was heard coming along the passage. Mary sprang up at the sound, for she knew the step; and Katharine too sprang up, for she knew it also. Marianna and Mrs. Bracton only listened, and looked towards the door.

"You're come at last, then, Mr. Kable," said Marianna, as Reuben entered, holding out her hand, but without rising.

"Yes, Marianna, and very happy to see you all looking so comfortable. Pray be seated, Miss Katharine," said Reuben, as he exchanged greetings throughout the circle. But that "*Miss* Katharine" went to Katharine's heart. To her cousin, it was simply "Marianna." Reuben on his part thought—"Marianna feels herself at home here; Katharine doesn't."

And now came back upon Katharine the reflections that had troubled her so before; and they came all the more forcibly that she now found herself under Reuben's roof. Before she had con-

sented to join her relatives in the visit, she had contemplated the position: but a sense of personal rectitude, and unwillingness to withhold her attendance from her cousin, together with a sense of the awkward mystery that would attach itself to a refusal; and even, it must be added, curiosity to see Reuben's dwelling-place, and perhaps a lingering beam of hope, united, had caused her almost immediately to forego her scruples. But now it seemed to her that she had done the most undesirable thing imaginable, and placed herself, she could not help thinking, in a most humiliating position. Could it be questioned that her first frankness had been unobserved by such a close observer as Reuben Kable? Why, he had argued that her track to the hill-top was the track of one alone, from a circumstance so slight that to her it would have never suggested anything: the same quickness of conception was traceable in his remark about Mr. Hurley's arrival: and then, again, how rapidly and effectively he had dealt with the hands on the farm. It seemed quite indubitable that he must have fully understood her first display of feeling towards him; and equally certain, from the familiar and insinuating kindness of his manner to her cousin, that his taste was for such a character as Marianna's, and averse from such a one as her own; while he must regard her, for the very ingenuousness itself, with contempt. Again, therefore, the cautiousness, stiffness, and frigidity of a vexed self-esteem came back into Katharine's manner, and came back more definitely and more expressively: amounting even to a display of uneasiness in Reuben's presence.

After the first day at home, Reuben found something or other requiring him to be away from the farm during the chief part of the day. A close observer, however, might have noticed tokens of attempts on his part to meet with Katharine alone: but they were always thwarted, either by her own misconceptions, or by Mary's monopolising procedures. And so on till Willoughby returned to escort the party back to Sydney.

One incident occurred, however, which, if Katharine's mind had not been so much disturbed, might well have brought home to it a clear conception of the case. After all had retired to rest on the last night of their stay, far on in the night, the old cook came, and, knocking at the young lady's door till he awoke her, reminded her that her window was open, and that it was raining very sharply, with a strong wind on that side of the cottage. Some one evidently had been wandering out in the bush at that late hour—some one who felt interest enough in her to observe her window through the darkness and tempest of the night; and yet as evidently not the messenger, for he was shivering, and his teeth chattering, as if he had just come out into the cold from the warm kitchen where he slept.

Yet, glad as Katharine now was to get away, she could not help feeling a sinking of heart as she walked down the path in the morning along with Mary towards the wharf. Willoughby and

Reuben were engaged on board, making all as comfortable as possible for the party, and Mary's namesake was to make a special trip without cargo for them. Mrs. and Miss Bracton were already at the water-side.

"My dear Mary," said Katharine, "you distress me. Pray do not let me have to think I have left you so unhappy."

Mary could only sob. She had her thoughts: had had them all along; but she could not bring herself to tell Katharine what they were. But she dried her tears, and went forward. Halfway down, Katharine also lingered, and turned back and gazed.

"When?" cried Mary, through fresh tears, as she marked the forlorn and earnest expression of her friend's face.

"Oh—perhaps—almost certainly—*never!—never!*"

Katharine dropped her veil. Mary, who cared nothing about the sailors seeing she had been crying, so that the skipper didn't scold her for it, did not wear one.

At length all was ready, and Reuben and Mary passed round to make their adieux. Oh, Love! Strange tell-tale against thyself! Never yet known to keep thy secret finally safe! Mary selected Willoughby for the last grasp of her hand; but Reuben selected Katharine. Katharine's heart (cold as were her words) throbbed visibly under the silken vestment, as if it would beat its way through; and ere she had well closed her hand on the Australian's, it withdrew itself convulsively. Reuben felt it, and wondered. Taken in connexion with her coldness and frigidity hitherto, it puzzled him: it had the effect on him of a contradiction in terms. But Marianna also saw it, and she looked at Reuben (though he looked not at her) and saw his astonishment. And then Marianna sat down; and it was not till the roll of the ocean surge began to discompose herself and her fellow-passengers that she ceased to ponder.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Tidings from England—Sire and Son—A Family Council—A Loan.

THE *Harponier's* oil and bone were transferred to the owners' stores in such "double-quick" time, and Willoughby heard so many dry hints whenever he stepped into the counting-house, as to "how bad her hold looked when it was empty," that he judged, all circumstances considered, the best thing for him to do would be to get away again down the harbour as quickly as he could. A veteran might have ventured to take his own time.

The ladies, therefore, being landed at Sydney, and lodged in an hotel there, were obliged to write to Mr. Bracton, senior, to send down the groom with the little snug curricle, which they had now

for some time had; and Mary had once more to resign her lover to adventure amidst tyrant surge and treacherous wind. And well it was for him, for her, for all, that none knew when, and where, and how they were to meet again.

Yet scarcely was his vessel out of sight of land, when the first note—and a wild and startling one it was—of the last great passage of his and all their fortunes, rang out from the trumpet of destiny.

"Mamma," said Katharine, as she whiled away the now long, long hours, one evening, by reading the day's paper a second time over, "here's a letter for Willoughby, advertised in the post-office list of undiscovered addresses:—'Willoughby Bracton, Esq., Sydney, N. S. W.' That must be from Charles: probably a packet with letters for us all. This is why we haven't heard from the dear fellow so long."

In another instant both mother and sister, from behind Katharine's shoulder, were poring over the name, as it stood amidst a host of others in one of the columns of the ever-multifarious list.

"It must be for us," exclaimed Marianna: "I have never heard of any one else of our name in the colony yet. That, with the rarity of the Christian name ——"

"And 'Sydney,' too, you see," observed Katharine. "If there were any stated resident of the city of that name, he surely would have been known: but Willoughby being out at sea when the letter arrived, they could not find him."

Mrs. Bracton only tried to clear her throat; and then hurriedly and nervously rang the bell. The waiter, on coming up, informed the ladies that the post-office was closed for the day. They had to wait—and such waitings are some of the hardest portions of our schooling in the virtue of patience—till the office opened next day. Then the letter was soon procured.

Truly enough, it was in Charles's own handwriting. But it was only a single letter: there were evidently no others enclosed within it. Was it to be opened? They thought, and they all said, *Yes*. He might be ill: for why else had he written only to his brother? Mrs. Bracton looked pale as death: her hand trembled so violently that she could not break the seal. Marianna took the letter out of her mother's hand, opened it, and glanced her eyes rapidly down the page. What is the matter? The sister, dropping the letter, has sprung up with an exclamation full of sorrow, surprise, and anxiety. Katharine hastily picks up the paper from the hearth-rug. "Read—read—Katharine!—my dear, tell me what it is," sobs and cries the mother: for Charles is his father's favourite, and therefore hers: they have often told each other they should die without him. Slowly and painfully, half-blinded with tears, and half-choked with sobs, Katharine, who had fondled the lad in his babyhood as passionately as his mother had her, goes on to read:—

"*London, 3rd January.*

"DEAR WILLOUGHBY,

"I can hardly make up my mind to write this letter: but I know so well it is what you would wish me to do under the circumstances, that I must try.

"Not to keep you in suspense, the occasion is this:—I have let myself in for a debt of upwards of 900*l.*, for which I have given bills payable in twelve months. It is true it is a debt which can never be recovered by law: but unless I pay it, I shall live for ever henceforth under an ineffaceable stigma. All my friends in the profession know of it: their eyes are upon the result; and wherever I may be hereafter, I shall meet with some of them. What am I to do? I know you will say that, if possible, it should be paid.

"Well, I want you to see my father, and break the matter gradually to him, and tell him that if he will furnish me with the amount, I shall consider that I have no future claim upon him. At the same time, do not lead him to suppose that by so saying I mean to forget him or any of you. I shall only the more readily hasten over to join you.

"I can't say any more. You know the case just as it stands. And I shall await anxiously yours in reply. Believe me, dear brother, yours, as ever,

"CHARLES BRACTON."

"There!" said Katharine, as she laid the letter down on the table.

Mrs. Bracton seemed to recover herself wonderfully. Her face seemed to say, "How foolish of the girls—it's only some money gone—there's nothing the matter with himself."

Katharine saw what was passing in her aunt's mind; and taking up the letter again, she said:—

"You see what the date is, mamma: nearly eight months ago. He'll be wondering by this time; and then despairing; and then who can tell what he may not do?"

The mother's soul was again in agonies; and she trembled from head to foot like a tree whose leaves are shaken by the wind: in her extreme agony she moaned aloud, and would have fallen, but her niece and her daughter hastened to her support.

"Don't let us forget, mamma," said Marianna, after a few moments, "what papa has often told us of late—'That the night is ever the darkest and coldest just before the dawn of day.' Let us go home to him directly."

"We *must*," said Katharine; there is not a moment to be lost. It is now August: there is barely time to transmit the money to England before the bills will be due."

Waiting no longer for their own vehicle, the ladies set off next morning by the mail, thus saving several days. Of Lieutenant Bracton forgiving and doing all he could for Charles they had no fear: but they doubted whether, on such a sudden demand, he

could raise the necessary amount in cash; and a still more distressing consideration even than that, was the long and anxious suspense they must all undergo before information of the result could reach them.

The worst apprehension, however, pressed upon them from the circumstance of the singular affection and community of feeling that existed between Charles and his father. The old gentleman was deficient in affection towards none of his family; but towards Charles it was a passion that brooked no restraint. In person, understanding, and temper, there was such a perfect similarity between them as to make them appear, when seen consecutively, rather the same being, viewed at the two ages, than different individuals. If in any point there was an observable dissimilarity, it was in the son possessing a larger intellectual organization than the father. But that, after all, only promoted the main effect of this agreement of character: only brought the child the more effectually and readily into sympathy with the parent. Even before the infant could talk, his large, open, meditative eyes constantly watching his father's face, seemed to maintain a mutual intelligence between them. Then, as he grew on into boyhood, his father, and no one but his father, was his standing authority in everything; hence they became inseparable companions. Charles's presence (it was a matter of almost jealousy in the little circle) atoned to his father for every other absence. And, on the other hand, against every arrangement that separated him from his father, Charles fought a hard battle. In his early years he had inclined to a naval life: but when Lieutenant Bracton retired from the profession, all thoughts of Charles following it passed quite away, as if by a tacit accord between themselves. And, in like manner, when the family emigrated, the lad had wanted to give up his studies and accompany them; but his father's remonstrances, uttered, as Charles knew, strongly against the impulsion of his mere feelings, prevailed on him to remain for the period needful for the completion of the course. And now the ladies said to one another, with a breathless apprehensiveness, "What will papa feel if anything should happen to Charles, when he recollects how anxious brother was to give up everything and come with us; and only submitted to stay behind because papa was so earnest with him to do so?"

But the tale had to be told—the letter shown—the ordeal gone through. Visibly and on the instant, the effect was scarcely discernible; but the smothered emotion soon began to proclaim its violence and extent by tokens ever indicative of great inward agitation and disturbance of the mental constitution—an entire change of ordinary habits. No viand sufficed to provoke appetite: the first, the second, the third night passed, and Mrs. Bracton had to tell her children each morning, in growing dismay, that their father had never slept; during the day his chief observable inclination appeared to be to keep himself in perpetual occupation; as

if by bodily action to allay and check the tendency to commotion in the mind. But he made no remarks upon the subject, and asked no counsel. All this was so different from his customary habits, that they felt at last that the silence was becoming intolerable, and that they must speak to him. The task was assigned to his daughter: standing behind his chair, and putting her arms round his neck, she went in her own style, in the style she knew he would listen to least impatiently, directly to the point:—

"Well, papa: what is to be done for my brother?—something or nothing? We want to know."

"I can't tell, Nanny. I know of nothing yet but for me to go to England by the vessel that sails out of Port Jackson, a week from yesterday."

"Papa?"

"I know of nothing else. Another vessel sails in three weeks: but I could not raise the money in the colony within that time; and then no other sails for six weeks, which will be too late, without any doubt."

"No more vessels than two in the six weeks?"

"Yes, several; but none in the latter three weeks direct for England. Several are advertised to go round by China and the East Indies; but they would be too long on the passage."

"But I thought you had upwards of six hundred in cash, in the bank still?"

"No: I have parted with it to within the last fifty pounds, since you went down the country, in part payment of two more flocks of fine-woolled sheep. I have no resource but to borrow the amount required here: which will certainly take three weeks, if not an entire month, to accomplish; or else proceed to England and raise it there: which I can do, I dare say, easily enough. If I attempt to raise the money here, there will be first nearly a week's journey to Sydney; then, not improbably, as matters go at present, it will take another week to find a party to come to an understanding with; then, that party will wish to come or send his agent up here to inspect the security; and then there will be his journey back to Sydney again. So that, taking the common probability of delay and the time for the transaction of the business itself together, I cannot make sure of being in time. The only other alternative is as I said at first. But I know you like to make one in a council of war about anything of importance; so, if you have anything to say, let us hear it."

"No, papa: we are all depending upon you."

"Well, think till to-morrow morning; I must then decide."

"Katharine and I are agreed that we would rather get our living as sempstresses as long as we live, than let Charles be stigmatized as dishonourable: but mamma says the debt oughtn't to be paid."

"Pooh, pooh! Not paid, eh? It's bad enough for it to have

been contracted. As it is, there is only one party a scoundrel: if it were left unpaid, there would be two."

"I am glad you think so, papa."

"It is not the loss, Nanny, that grieves me: but I am apprehensive about this unfortunate delay. Willoughby 'd only smoke an extra cigar over such an annoyance; but Charles"—— and shaking his head, he left the sentence uncompleted. "I tremble when I think of his waiting day after day, expecting an answer and getting none. However, let us not talk any more: the matter is *to do something*."

Marianna did think, as she was bidden; and what she thought was very much to the purpose: but she could not make up her mind to utter it. She thought, "If the Sydney people are so hard up for money with their over-speculating, I dare say Mr. Moses is not; and here he is on the very spot, and knows all about our property and character: we pay him a large bill every year, and he is as fond of me as he can be." This was true enough: but, there was something else which Marianna also revolved in her mind that was equally true, though far from as agreeable to contemplate. But then, thought she, "this *faux pas* of Charlie's will hardly escape becoming known to Rachael, or, which is even worse, surmised by her without being acknowledged by us. She will naturally become aware of the loan: she knows no exigency of ours here requires such a sum on a sudden; and will inevitably connect it with our brother at home. The large amount, and the precipitancy of the business together, will surely infuse suspicion into her mind; and suspicion will ask questions and observe signs, and then everything will tend to reveal the truth."

Though much recruited in strength by her trip to Brisbane Water, and still further roused by her brother's remonstrances, Marianna's condition was yet that of an invalid; and, by evening, thought upon thought, along with the solicitude which caused those thoughts, had quite overcome her. She had now, as often before, when perplexed by the over-action of her mind, to call Katharine to her councils; and, laying all the *pros* and *cons* before her cousin's clear understanding, desire Katharine's judgment on the matter. As usual, her cousin solved the problem instantaneously:—

"Don't you see, Nanny, you are thinking in your own interest and not in either Charles's or Rachael's? You are considering about the accomplishment or non-accomplishment of your own favourite plan; not what will be best for themselves, or even most agreeable. If Rachael (who, meantime, can as yet care very little about Charles) should dismiss him from her good opinion on account of this affair, why, she will suffer nothing in doing so: her very disapprobation will neutralize her regret; and as for Charles, surely there are other women in the world besides Rachael: but if there were not, which is best for him—to be got

out of this dilemma, and afterwards take his chance for her; or remain in it, and perhaps be lost to us all?"

Next morning, long before her usual hour, Marianna had risen and was seeking her father. He, as we all so often do, had overlooked the near and facile, in the distant and difficult: but he now saw that Marianna's suggestion was in all probability the most available one, and certainly that which ought to be the earliest experimented. Indeed, its probable success seemed so great that he walked in with her quite altered in countenance and manner; and partook of breakfast with a degree of cheerfulness and appetite he had not before shown since the distressing tidings arrived.

After breakfast, Mr. Bracton—first reminding them that if he should be unsuccessful at the township, they might see him no more for some months—bade his family adieu, and rode forward.

The aged Hebrew was at home, and, after the first surprise, listened with deepest attention to the proposals made to him. Lieutenant Bracton refrained, of course, from specifying the occasion of such an urgent demand upon his purse: he merely stated that in the course of the mutations of life, such a demand had been made upon him from England; and that in the event of his not being able to command the sum in the course of three weeks within the colony, he must proceed by the vessel advertised then to sail, and realize it by means at his command in the parent country. He offered, as the course both most ready and much the most agreeable to himself, to give bills at twelve months for it: or, if that were not satisfactory, to accept it on mortgage on the usual terms. The conversation was between the two elders themselves, alone: Rachael was not present.

"Vell, vell!" said the old Hebrew, in a slow, soothing, and considerate tone, after he had heard Mr. Bracton to the end; "it ish all de gootness of Got! He vill gif ven he shee fit; and ven he shee fit he yill take avay. I haf vonce lose fifteen hundred pound in von day, and I never doubt it vas de gootness of Got. Indeed, I find it out afterwards dat it vos noting elsh. You shall not want for de bit of monish, Mr. Practon. I vill take your bill: I pelieve you are a risheous man; and you are very kind to Rashael ven everypody else will not look upon her pecause she is a Jewess: and your daughter, too, love my shild as if she vas her sister. You shall haf de monish, Mr. Practon, and I vill not sharge you all de interesht too, vat I can make mid anypody elshe."

That evening, Marianna wept over the feeble and trembling signature of the Jew, of late rapidly becoming weaker, at the foot of a cheque which her father drew from his pocket-book, for a thousand pounds; and, early next morning, Lieutenant Bracton was on his way to Sydney, to effect the remittance by the vessel which was to sail in a few days.

CHAPTER XXX.

The Bushranger's Progress—Reward offered for Beck's Apprehension—Tom of the Swamp—An Outlaw's Hardships—"Marcus George, the Scholar."

It was now some weeks since the black, startled by the information he had derived at his interview with Reuben Kable, "took the bush," as it is termed in the common parlance of the country. When working in the brushes at the head of Brisbane Water, he had heard of Reuben as a fellow-native of the colony; and he knew, by general repute, that his character was such that he was not likely to have been jesting, or wantonly intimidating him. Reuben was considered to be a young man of remarkably upright aims, and as bold, straightforward, and undissimulating in pursuing them.

With the warrant hanging over his head already, and the probability that a reward for his apprehension would be advertised in the public papers,—aware of the almost infallible alertness of the colonial police, and sensible what a marked man he was by his colour,—Beck saw at once that there was now no safety for him except in the fastnesses of the wilderness. Such a life had no charms for him; and he felt that, having gone thus far, he must go yet farther. He now sought, therefore, to escape from the colony altogether; and to effect this he must have money from somewhere. "After getting so much, and working hard so long, it's hard indeed," he thought, "if I can't secure some of it." How to get at his money in the bank he was puzzled: he could devise no expedient that seemed sufficiently practicable and safe. For the present, therefore, he gave up that question, and turned his mind to his cattle at the Coal River. He thought he knew a settler near the coast, north of the Coal River Settlement—a man originally a convict—one of the lowest in point of morals, but well off in point of property, to whom he could sell a large selection from the herd. They would be difficult to get in, and, under the circumstances, far less than their value would be offered: still that was better than nothing. He therefore concluded to push off to the nor'ard and ascertain what could be done.

All this while, however, the gang had been making itself notorious. The stock-keepers round the quarter, though they did not choose to take part against them (and indeed, in most cases, could not do so without compromising their own safety), yet looked very cool upon them, now they had come to be virtually condemned men. It was evident to them that the career of the gang must have an end some time or other; and then who could tell whether when in gaol they might not bring others into trouble? Dubbo, too, reported the conduct of the black in terms anything but advantageous to him. "I mean to say," said Dubbo, "that a

man who would shoot a dog that had followed him, in such a cowardly manner, would shoot his own mate if it served his turn. I took care to keep my weather eye up till I got away." And Dubbo, accordingly, had not only not visited his former associates any more, but had resolutely determined against having any hand in their depredations for the future.

Thus Beck and his comrades found their supplies much more difficult to obtain than they had expected. Whenever, singly or collectively, they visited the hut of some adjacent stock-keeper, they were welcomed to a feed, and had plenty of verbal sympathy lavished upon them: but the hut was almost always "just then short of flour;" and a most ostentatious "look out" was kept whilst they remained, to signify to them, as civilly but as strongly as possible, that their visit was felt to be dangerous and unwelcome. Irritated by this, they felt the more inclined to abandon themselves to violent measures.

First, in the exigency of the hour, when the last pound of flour was baked, a distant and solitary shepherd's hut was visited and ransacked; then followed a more wholesale forage of an entire line of stations, which afforded a supply for many days; and, finally, as they returned to their haunt one evening from a visit to one of the friendly stock-keepers, they came upon a dray laden with stores, on its way to form a new station on one of the minor streams tributary to the Morrumbidgee. The opportunity was a rare one, and the temptation great; for they had been to look for some flour and tobacco, and had got none. After a few minutes' consultation, they rode up to the party, and representing themselves as stockmen, lingered about the fire till the bullock-driver and his mate had gone away for a while; and then Beck, who was the only one of the three who happened to be armed, took charge of the overseer with a cocked pistol, whilst Morgan and Dubbo loaded the three horses with as much flour, tobacco, tea, and sugar as they could carry, in addition to their riders, without much checking their pace.

It happened that the dray belonged to one of those gentlemen who hold seats in the Legislative Council; and (we need scarcely remark) a robbery to the amount of five shillings of the property of one of the magnates of the human race, is of infinitely more consequence every way, than a robbery of fifty pounds done upon a person of inferior condition: consequently, ten days had not elapsed before the following proclamation appeared in the *Gazette*:—

Colonial Secretary's Office, Sydney.

"Whereas, it has been represented to his Excellency the Governor, that there is a gang of bushrangers committing depredations on the stations adjacent to the Morrumbidgee River; and that in addition to other felonies, they have lately robbed a dray belonging to a settler on its way to the interior; and that

the said gang is armed with fire-arms; and further, that the principal individual is a native of the colony, of the name of Martin Beck, *alias Black Beck*, against whom there is already a warrant in force from the Bench at Newcastle, on a charge of cattle-stealing: This is to give notice, that a Reward of Fifty Pounds will be paid to any individual who shall lodge the said Martin Beck in one of her Majesty's Gaols; and a Reward of Twenty-five pounds to any individual who shall give such information to the Police as shall enable them to apprehend the said Martin Beck.

"Beck is a black, the son of American parents. He stands rather over six feet high; stammers slightly; and is well-built and good-looking. Age under thirty years.

"By command of His Excellency."

A few days after the proclamation was gazetted, Dubbo called at his countryman's at the township to have a glass, and was shown the document immediately.

"Wasn't I a good judge?" exclaimed Dubbo. "I know'd there'd be no luck with such a fellow as that. But I must have this paper, you know, Peter. It won't do to let 'em drop in for it foolish: must give 'em the office."

When Warraghi next called at Dubbo's, the *Gazette* was handed to him; and by him carried home to be read to his principal. Beck laughed, half in contemptuous irritation, half in the irritation of fear, till every pearl-white tooth in his head was grimly visible.

"You see what I'm worth, lads: fifty pounds! Not a bad chap, that governor! 'Tisn't every body he'd take the like notice of, though. However, there's one good turn he's done me: he's put me fly not to show in the Coal River Settlement—just the very place I should have gone to; for I thought all along it was a warrant from the Bench of Maitland. Warraghi, you can write—I wish you'd write us a bit of a scrawl to the old bloke, to tell him he's what I call a trump. If it had not been for this, I should have run slap into the noose, and never found it out till it was too late. However, now, I'm off to-morrow."

Beck accordingly started next day. The road he had to traverse is a cross-track, between districts that have so little business communication with each other, that a traveller is comparatively a rarity upon it. Still he omitted no precaution that from his knowledge of the country and its customs he thought advisable. As much as he could he kept the bush; and where he was compelled to ride along the road, he shunned both travellers and stations as much as possible.

When he came into the more populous region of the Hunter—the lower part of which it is that bears the name of the Coal River, from the mines at Newcastle, the settlement at its mouth—he concealed himself in the ravines by day, and travelled by

night; and thus, as a mounted horseman, and passing through the main settlements at an hour when his colour could not be distinguished, he succeeded in reaching his destination in safety.

The individual whom Beck had pitched upon for dealing with, was at home; and still, as formerly, living a solitary life. His ground was on the edge of a great swamp, covered with reeds in summer, till they were dry enough to burn; and then becoming bleak, black, and desolate-looking, till returning spring brought forth the crop again. His hut and small bit of cultivation ground were slightly elevated above the morass itself; and all round it on every other side there was the still, dreary, melancholy forest. One old man was his companion: but whether a partner, or servant, a relative, or a stranger, no one knew. The curiosity of the country around, on this point, had exhausted itself in vain: but there was a prevalent notion abroad, felt rather than acknowledged, that these two men were bound together by mutual fears, and mutual remorse for some dark deed they had committed. Each had a hut of his own; they talked very little together, and what they did utter to each other was never known to have the tone of faith and friendliness. Each did what he chose; and, when he chose, reproached the other without mercy for oversights and neglects. Some of their cattle they seemed to have in common: but by far the larger part running in the bush behind belonged to the youngest man only, who seemed to make this private portion of the stock his hobby—his resource from the uneasiness of a mind not sufficiently occupied by the duties of the tillage, or distressfully wrought upon by some more hidden cause. There was no female about their place, and it only rarely occurred that a wandering tribe of blacks was detained for a few hours for some special purpose.

Beck arrived at the hut of "Tom of the Swamp" a little before midnight. He knew the bush hereabouts well, for he had traversed it often to some falls of cedar lying in this direction. Half a dozen words sufficed to recall him to the recollection of the younger man, to whom his offer was to be made. The door was quickly unbarred, his horse turned off in the hobbles, a fresh supply of fuel placed on the embers, and supper set before him. His host told him at once that he had long ago heard of the warrant, and now knew of the reward; nevertheless he entertained his proposal, provided it were worth anything. Beck could remain, he said, out of sight there, whilst he rode over and looked about among the cattle, and heard what the neighbouring stock-keepers and little settlers said about them. It was nearly day-break when they terminated their consultation, with everything (as Beck hoped) satisfactorily settled; and after breakfast his host departed. It was not till the next night that he returned, when Beck could see, by his jaunty but dissatisfied air, that it was a failure. By everybody's account, Tom said, and so far as he could judge himself from riding through the ranges where the cattle were,

there appeared to be no chance of getting in one out of every score, without a whole troop of horsemen to assist: which was what he could not command: besides, the best of them were gone. By ones, and twos, and threes at a time, the pick of them had vanished. A stockman told him, that one little settler had, to his knowledge, shot such and such a bullock to supply himself with beef; and the little settlers returned the compliment in like manner on the stockmen. Beck offered the chance of them at a lower price—at next to nothing. No! "Tom of the Swamp" would have nothing to do with the concern.

The black had, therefore, to retrace his steps. It was almost the coldest period of the year, and he had to camp out for security almost every other night. The mountains were bleak and forlorn-looking by day, and by night the cold fog, passing at times into the light hoar frost of this part of the colony, lay thick and cheerless over the flats and swamps. Mile after mile in terror, day after day in hunger, night after night in damp, cold, and solitude—such was Beck's journey there; such was his journey back. Going, he had some expectation of success, a gleam of hope to cheer and invigorate him; but all the way back, with a jaded frame and a worn-out horse, suffering hunger and cold, and tormented with ceaseless apprehension of being identified and arrested, he was doomed to the dismal perplexity of baffled schemes, and the blank despair of seeing his last air-built castle in ruins. The gaol, the dock, and the penal settlement, danced before his eyes; the clank of the leg-iron, the hiss of the scourger, and the yell of the scourged, sounded in his ears. Early one morning the wretched fugitive reached the Basin of Rocks; as he drew his bridle beside the smouldering logs in front of the Ghibber Gunyah, and hailed Morgan and Warraghi to turn out, his eyes looked blood-cast and fierce, and he only a skeleton image of himself. His comrades eyed him in silence, and exchanged significant glances with each other.

A fresh source of perplexity and annoyance now presented itself to Beck. During his absence, his comrades, in their wanderings through the bush, had met with another party of three bushrangers; and, acting on the impulsive desire for company, had assented to their offer of joining them, and conducted them to their own haunt. To Beck's clear understanding, it was immediately evident that this compact was ill made. His aim was to gather booty, and make a specific use of it; whereas the three new-comers were mere thoughtless, slothful characters, who cared for no more than living from hand to mouth; seeking nothing till they were in extremity, and then becoming regardless of the future, in exact proportion to the successes they obtained.

Their leader was one of those pretenders to knowledge who have so unaccountably the gift of imposing themselves as superlatively sagacious on the vulgar and uneducated. Beck instantly

saw into the man's character, and abominated him the more because he felt himself unable to expose him. His Christian name he gave out to be Marcus Theophilus George; and he was related —so he further gave out (though this was evidently received with different degrees of belief by different parties)—to a very honourable and ancient family in Ireland. One of his companions was a hard, black, bullet-headed, little man, a countryman of his own; the other an Englishman, from one of the rural districts, who had been in the army, and had been transported for some contemptible theft on a comrade—a poor mindless piece of village animalism. Upon these two Marcus George had made great impression; and, once sensible of the pleasures of leadership, he could not think of contemplating their renunciation. Already, before Beck's return, his character and title to direct the gang had been fully canvassed; and the claim of the fresh aspirant to the office began to be a matter of consideration with Brown and Warraghi. In fact, the feeling in favour of his competitor had so far established itself, that Beck could see that if he attempted to get rid of him by any violent measure, he should also be forsaken by his own comrades. Nothing therefore remained but to put up with the inevitable evil, till the course of events should cure or alleviate it. All went on, for the present, nominally under Beck's direction; but everything, in the mean time, tended more and more to sour his temper: making him feel more reckless, and preparing him to act more desperately.

One evening over their fire there had been a long conversation about their prospects, and about the most safe and advantageous course to take. Marcus George had been maintaining that it was possible to escape by land from the colony: Morgan and Warraghi, as well as his own comrades, felt inclined to believe that he was right; and it was in vain that Beck protested and explained his reasons for knowing to the contrary. Marcus George assured them that if they followed out the Port Philip track due north, for about three parts of the way to that settlement, and then went off at a right angle to the westward, and only kept in a straight direction long enough, it would be impossible for them to miss "Timo."* And then, by waiting till they got the chance of taking a ship from the natives of that country, they would be able to get to America.

Beck at last jumped up, and, going into the hut, brought out the empty flour-bag, and holding it with the mouth downwards, shook it significantly several times, as he stood in the midst of the group. The action at once recalled to the recollection of all the necessity for an immediate supply of provision.

"We'll put off going to America," said Beck, "till we've got

* It is an old legend amongst the more ignorant of the convicts, that Timor, or, as they call it, "Timo," is easily attainable by land from New South Wales, and that, once there, they would be free from recapture.

move, we might have had something worse than cold. We must wait a couple of hours longer yet."

In the mean time it was arranged that they should all proceed in silence together to the edge of the bush; and that from thence Warraghi, who was an old hand at housebreaking, should go on alone; and, approaching the store on the side opposite to that on which the dog was tied, disengage a sufficient extent of shingles from the roof to enable him to enter by the aperture. He was then to unbar the door, without noise, from the inside, and flashing the light of a single match through the darkness, afford them a signal at once brief, noiseless, and intelligible. If the inside could once be gained, they considered that the dog would be too perplexed to proceed to more than a few growls: but if he should turn out more intelligent than they expected, some more efficient means must be resorted to for silencing him. Beck had always feared that an unwise step had been taken in admitting three such men as their latter comrades into the gang; but principally he suspected that Marcus would not prove staunch. He therefore could not be lost sight of at such a juncture, but was included in the party that were to enter the store; whilst Morgan and the soldier were left to hold the horses.

The two hours were nearly past. They could see, by the steady way in which the fire on the hills had hitherto kept sinking, without any fresh and sudden blaze, that in all probability the police party, who had started from the township in pursuit of them, had not yet arrived so far. But in the mean time the sky had become completely black with clouds; and a rough cold wind began to draw along through the bush. Occasionally, as it increased, it swayed the tree-tops heavily, and then ceased,—sounding as if some violent contest between unseen beings was on the eve of commencing over-head. The blaze on the hills revived too, as the air became more and more agitated; and at length up flew whole clouds of sparks: not once only, but again, and again, and again. Beck instantly pointed it out.

"Do you see that, my lads?—there!—and there again! That's more wood the soldiers are throwing on. It's given them a job, to climb that mountain in the dark: it's sure now to be full three hours before they'll be back, if they're back before morning. Ten to one they'll stop and look for us there, for we left an old blanket and a tin pot behind, to make 'em think we'd only just bolted. Now, let's have no dropping down: every man do what he's told, in the way he's told. We all understand, you know: so to work, Warraghi; it'll never be nearer the right time. Only, of all things, do what you've got to do as still as death: and mind what I told you about the dog's-chain; it's fastened to a staple inside the slabs, and runs out between them. He won't hear you, with this wind blowing, till you're inside; and then, if he begins to make a noise, run to the chain at once, and drag it through till you've got

his neck tight against the slabs: and we must wait till all's quiet again, and you flash the match."

Warraghi, who, though professedly a thief, was not a courageous man, proceeded to his task with palpitating heart. But it was one of those situations in which deeply-formed habit soon predominates over natural disposition. In ten or twelve minutes' time the sudden brief light of Warraghi's match was seen from the door; and the others, from the edge of the bush, passed in noiseless file rapidly across the green, led by Beck. The latter and Rooney had arms, and carried the bags. Marcus, at Beck's suggestion, had been requested to carry the keg; and that being a more unmanageable load, he had left his arms behind.

The marauders safe within, the door was instantly re-barred; and through the shuttered window there was no fear of detection by the light. Once more a match flashed amidst the darkness, and the dog, startled by the light as Warraghi with trembling hand seized one of the store candlesticks and lit it, gave a fierce bark, and then growled intermittingly, as if perplexed. The black, throwing down everything but his pistols, instantly darted round, and stooping into the little skillen, seized the end of the faithful brute's chain and drew it in, hand over hand; till, as he threw his weight upon its full extension, the rougher and fiercer sounds that the dog emitted during the struggle terminated in broken, stifled coughs. All stood motionless, awaiting the result: but of that there needed have been no doubt among them; for every half-minute the sallow eyeballs of the black turned on Warraghi with a sneering glare, as if to say, "Tell Dubbo when you see him next." After some minutes, Beck slackened the chain and waited—no motion; slackened it yet more, and waited; no, none: laid it down, and laid his ear to the slabs—not a sound! and then he sprang up, and laying hold of a tumbler that stood on the head of one of the butts, half filled it from the tap, and, drinking it off, proceeded to hand similar doses to his mates. Since he had become a bushranger, and especially since his journey of disappointment to the Coal River, Beck's habits of temperance had been gradually, but not slowly, giving way; and now, whenever spirits came in his way, he drank unscrupulously to the fullest extent which a hitherto unimpaired system enabled him to do with tolerable impunity.

The middle door opened immediately on lifting the latch; and within all was undisturbed and silent. For an instant Beck hesitated: suppose he should find himself face to face with Marianna! But it was too late to recede. He passed forward, first to the door he supposed to be Rachael's: for he knew that when the old do sleep, as evidently the Jew now did, they sleep heavily. He tried the door, and it also opened: the room lay all in neatest order, and rich odours of the rose and violet pervaded the cool, still air; but the couch was vacant.

His quick ear, laid to the door of the other room, quickly informed him that the old store-keeper slept, and was breathing uneasily, like one in a troublous dream. In another instant, first passing the light to the nearest hand, Beck's gripe was upon the old man's throat. But in vain, as the Jew awoke to an affrighted consciousness, did Beck demand money from him: he maintained (whether it were true or false) what he once said before—that all the coin he had taken lately had been required to give the balances of their cheques to his customers; further, that cheques themselves, which Beck would have been very glad to hold as security, had been despatched by the last mail to Sydney. Still his assailant could not believe a Jew to be without money; and, leaving the old man in the custody of Marcus, he ordered Warraghi and Rooney to "get on and fill the bags: it's all round you—you can't go astray;" and proceeded himself to search the house minutely. Once more his stratagems were to turn against himself. One of the first things that he cast his eyes upon was Rachael's watch, and appended to it was a ring containing a braid of her mother's hair. The old man half rose as he saw the sacrilegious hand of the outlaw upon it; but by a struggle of intelligence he subdued his emotion, and waited quietly till the Black had proceeded into the store and was endeavouring to break the desk. Then he turned, and, beckoning his guard close up, and speaking cautiously, he said, "If you vill pring me dat ring again, I shall gif you more monish ever so mosh ash it ish vort;" and again speaking a second time, as if the excitement of mind had just stimulated him to take so much notice, he added,—"and if you ish in trouble, I shall say you vos de only man vot come here to-night vot hash no firearm;" and again, after a second or two more, as Marcus George stood hesitating how to act, he adjoined,—"bot you mosh not tell Peck; he ish a great rashcall. He shell you; take my vort for it, he shell you de firsht time he haf a shance. He vant to shell hish own master to me," added the poor old man, falling from the tone and gesture of a feeble indignation into a sort of paroxysm of the laughter of second childishness. "Bot you come to-morrow, or next day, or any day vidin a veek or two, and I shall gif what I shay for de ring; and I shall keep it dark. No von hurt you."

Beck searched till keg and bags and all were filled, and carried across and lodged securely for travelling on the horses: nay, till his associates began to talk so loudly and boisterously that he had to check them; and even he himself, adding glass to glass, saw the light of the candle, as it gleamed dissipated and enfeebled through the capacious apartment, rather like a thick mist than aught else; but his search was unsuccessful.

Getting all his mates off to the further side of the green, he took the precaution of locking the feeble old man into his room; and—although his voice could have no power to reach either the court-house or the other dwelling-places in the township—told

him that he meant to keep watch on the outside till daybreak, and would not spare him for an instant if he attempted to give an alarm. By daybreak, however, the party of marauders was several miles advanced into the ranges, in the direction of the Basin of Rocks.

In the morning, all who were in anywise connected with the old man heard with regret what had befallen him; though the gang had for some time become so notorious, by the commission of dray and other robberies, that it created but little surprise. Rachael, overwhelmed with grief, hastened home from the Rocky Springs, unsparingly reproaching herself for having left her aged father alone: little and useless as must have been any aid she could have rendered in such an emergency. So inveterate had become his habits of parsimony and solitude, that no persuasions could induce him to retain a night watchman, or even allow the occasional porter to sleep beneath the roof. Lieutenant Bracton even called and reasoned with him: but ineffectually.

Beck had secured a number of small articles, and at the division of them Marcus succeeded in obtaining the ring; contenting himself with the thought that that at least could be converted into ready money, as soon as he could find an opportunity of visiting Ghiagong unobserved. It was some weeks before he was successful in getting into the vicinity of the store without associates; and then he had to wait till nightfall before he could venture to approach it: but when he did so, the old Hebrew instantly recognised him, and, mindful of his promise, withdrew him into the inner room.

Rachael wondered much when she saw her father conducting a man of such abject and disorderly appearance into his own room; and still more when, on coming out, he proceeded to give him a very ample supply of tobacco. But her wonder vanished on his departure; for, closing the doors after their mysterious visitor, her father re-entered the sitting-room, and with a smile of exultation laid down before her the regretted ring. He gave her to understand, more indeed by antic gestures than sentences, and with the exhibition of a gleeful cunning which wrung tears from her eyes, that he had made a compact with the robber to betray to him any similar depredatory project upon his property which Beck might contemplate. Indeed, from the night on which he had suddenly opened his eyes upon the grim scowl of the black, Lazarus Moses was never himself again; and every day the tokens of declining understanding and bewildered sentiment grew stronger and more constant.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Reuben and Katharine—Marianna and Mr. Hurley—Lieutenant Bracton's Difficulties—Fresh Anxieties—Death of Lazarus Moses.

REUBEN KABLE, after the departure of his friends from Brisbane Water, spent many an hour in perplexed thought, as he wandered through the mighty forests of gum trees, pursuing the occupations of the bushman and farmer. In a virtuous and pure mind a very little suffices to set the organism of hopeful thought into action; as in a mind of evil consciousnesses fear is easily evolved. When Reuben recollected his first interviews with Katharine, it was clear to him that he had then enjoyed her confidence in no ordinary degree; and when he reflected on the almost convulsive way in which she had withdrawn her hand on board the boat, it was equally clear to him that there were deeply excited feelings connected somehow or other with the change. But whence could any such feelings have originated? He was not sensible of anything on his part that could have caused them: his sole aim had been to benefit the family during the month of his residence amongst them. Nay, more; they all had manifested the most lively sense of his services—Katharine herself not excepted. And then he went on to ask himself:—"How can I have in any way offended Katharine? Katharine is labouring under some misconception about me, I am sure. What can it be? At this point his powers of analysis refused even to suggest a supposition. Where an error is made up by the action of several minds, the powers of one are inadequate, except in very rare instances indeed, to ascertain its nature; and this law prevails the most forcibly where minds are diversified by opposite kinds of education.

Katharine also, on her part, as the violent shock subsided which Charles's letter had given to them all, thought of many things which had not struck her before; not a little assisted by the occurrence of new circumstances. Marianna still spoke of Reuben with high regard: there was even a yearning for his presence; but attended with a tacit and unconscious intimation that she could find ample compensations for his absence. Besides, Marianna also spoke of Mr. Hurley sometimes; and, as Katharine perceived, it was with a very different tone and class of thought. Rachael, too, who was so especially in her cousin's confidence, did not seem after all to doubt Marianna's adherence to her first choice; but often made hopeful allusions and arbitratory remarks.

At length an event occurred which brought back almost the clear daylight. Once more there came to the cottage a letter in the handwriting of Mr. Hurley, addressed to her cousin; and with eager trembling hand, and cheek suffused with nothing of

the sallow hue of hate, but the glowing and fainting of a carmine light through a hundred tints—Marianna received the communication, and opened it. In it, Mr. Hurley entreated once more that she would not throw away his happiness, and he hoped he must also imagine her own, by a misconception of his character. And now that sober thought had supervened, Marianna's conscience at once ratified the justice of the remark. Indeed, so much of her exuberant vivacity had melted away, that there needed little to suggest that the world was not made for her will alone: she was becoming habituated to feel less of will itself. In the next paragraph, Mr. Hurley went on to say that he never ceased to think of her; that sometimes such long continued anxiety, added to the toils of business, greatly depressed his spirits, and left many an hour to cheerlessness, which, but for this unhappy misunderstanding, he should devote to hope and recreations. And all this Marianna knew must be very true; for the thoughts of those who love, prepared specially in regard to each others' minds, enter and establish themselves without suspicion and without challenge. At length, therefore, when Katharine had been asked her opinion for the first time—and possibly because the question was already thoroughly decided—and when Rachael also, for the hundredth time, had expressed her opinion, Marianna permitted her friend to say, in *her* next note to Mr. Hurley, that "as soon as she was a little better she would try to write to him:" and that note it was not long before Rachael had despatched.

Still week after week passed away without the promised letter being sent: unsatisfactory attempts were over and over again made to pen it, till the task seemed almost hopeless of satisfactory achievement; and the duty became one which it was more easy to hold in the mind as a thing determined upon, than one to be immediately performed. Oftentimes such little matters contain lessons so difficult of acquisition, that it requires the aroused attention of the whole spirit to learn them; and involve modifications of individuality so complete, that the actor hesitates over them, from a sort of doubt whether he will know himself again after they are effected. Such were the acknowledgments which Marianna felt she ought now to make, but could not bring herself to pen.

At this time it was that the outrage at the store took place. Disconnected, as in itself it seemed, with either Katharine's or Marianna's individual prospects and future happiness, it was far from being so in reality. The months were slowly creeping away, leaving but a small interval between the date when the bills given by Lieutenant Bracton would become due. Rachael now scarcely ever left home to visit them; and whenever they saw her, they imagined she displayed an increasing disquietude of mind. It was natural enough that she should feel discomfort in the contemplation of her father's increasing infirmities: but there seemed yet a

something besides which pressed, if possible, more painfully on her, but which she carefully refrained from giving utterance to. If she could say at any time that her father was much better, there was but little relief of the saddened expression of her countenance. Marianna at length assumed the licence of friendship, and inquired, more than once in vain, what was the hidden trouble of her friend. At length, when further disregard of these importunities seemed to be the greater unkindness of the two, Rachael, with many protestations of her own undying fidelity, consented to tell the tale. Her father—now almost as incomprehensive of the larger and more profound relations of things as a child, and probably secretly anticipating his own early dissolution —was perpetually contemplating the time when the bills would become due; manifesting all the avidity of age, along with the inconsiderateness of childhood. It seemed as if the reclamation of this money back into his own personal possession had become to him as the last great transaction of his life,—one from which there was no weaning his thought till it was accomplished.

"And believe me, dear Marianna," said Rachael, concluding her statement, "I would not tell you this even now, but that it seems an act of imperative justice to your father, in case he should be depending on paying the interest and renewing the bills. I never noticed the feeling in my father before that dreadful night on which he was so ill-treated by the bushrangers; but ever since then he seems to think nothing is safe unless he can really touch it or see it. I am sure that, in his natural state of mind, he has a high regard for you all."

"I don't know," replied Marianna, "whether to look at it so seriously as you do, or not. I know papa has not made any arrangements to meet it by money from home; and I really don't know how to talk to him about it. I must ask Katharine. Papa frets so as it is, that, though he says nothing, or very little, it's clearly wearing him to a shadow. Oh! Charles; my brother!"

"Your brother, Marianna? Then it isn't a loss you have had—but——"

The tale could be kept back no longer. At first the cousins had not known whether to tell Rachael the truth of the matter or to withhold it; and whilst doubt remained, caution had been spontaneous. But by degrees, as they found themselves unable to determine upon a mutual view, the subject of the occurrence itself also became a hackneyed one, and all mention of it had dropped, except in the most general way. Now, however, Rachael's frankness, as she consulted with her friend, threw Marianna entirely off her guard. Marianna, indeed, had but this one secret reserved from Rachael; and Rachael's ingenuousness had now made good its claim to that as a matter of right. Of course the sister told the favoured brother's fault as softly as it could be told, save by a wife alone. And if Rachael sighed in secret over the first romance of her heart so rudely handled by

truth, it was with no hasty, no ruthless vow, that not any reformation or change of circumstances should even yet prevent that romance from becoming a reality.

Katharine, meantime, advised that Lieutenant Bracton should be informed without delay of the course into which the business was diverging.

"The fact is this, Rachael," said Katharine, "he is depending partly on meeting the bills with his resources here; looking to two contingencies for at least half the amount. We expect Willoughby in before the twelvemonth expires; but in the event of his non-arrival, papa depends on renewing bills for that portion of the amount which he would have borrowed from him. The bills, if I am not mistaken, date from August: it is now late in January. Why, there will be barely time to make other arrangements as it is."

Without the delay of an unnecessary hour, Katharine informed her uncle of the unpleasant contraction of his prospect of meeting the demand. Lieutenant Bracton, once more throwing aside all minor matters, immediately proceeded to take the necessary measures; at the same time but too clearly betraying his apprehension that, such being the state of Mr. Moses's mind, too much time had already been lost. And now another sudden journey to the capital was inevitable.

But as Katharine and her cousin came to reflect over these things after the departure of Lieutenant Bracton, other and far more serious bearings of the matter became apparent to them. Marianna asked herself, and inquired of Katharine, whether, involved in such circumstances, she could properly enter into a correspondence with Mr. Hurley without mentioning them. Katharine assured her that her promised letter ought to be written, and the circumstances themselves, at the same time, candidly mentioned. But Marianna found this so great an addition to the difficulty she already felt of acquitting herself to her own satisfaction, that again, and again, and again delay followed delay.

And now to Katharine's own mind arose the doubt—whether *she* could take advantage of the new and cheering light that seemed as it were just dawning upon herself. She felt quite convinced now, that neither her cousin nor Reuben Kable regarded each other with any affection surpassing friendship; whilst towards herself Reuben seemed not to hesitate, in many little expressions and messages in Mary's letters, to avow a special attraction. Mary inquired after Marianna's health in common with her brother: but in regard to *herself*, there were many notifications of his feelings which Mary did not presume to join in, but only related. Mary appeared to feel that in all her brother's sentiments towards Marianna she might freely participate, and unite in all he said: but just as clearly did she appear to understand that Reuben's regard for Katharine was quite a different emotion from her own. Amongst other things, she wrote that "Reuben was counting the

days till his business would call him to Manaroo again, so that he might call and see them once more. He felt that he did not yet know Katharine half well enough, and sometimes feared she must think him very inconsiderate." And now, just as this bright light was dawning, a dark mist arose to shroud and darken it. "Can I," thought Katharine, "if Mr. Kable does indeed feel an attachment to me,—can I allow him to be deceived by remaining ignorant of this heavy blow on our circumstances? And, in the event of a difficulty arising in the payment of this money, even upon our conventional position, will he not impute to me a selfish duplicity? If I am ready to run the risk of acknowledging it, why not do so? If I am not willing, is it not desiring to retain his attachment by disingenuous means?"

Lieutenant Bracton returned from Sydney, depressed by the opinion of his notary that the necessary business in England could not be transacted, and the remittance made to him, within the period at which it would be required; and that, in all probability, it would not arrive till two months later. Thus cloud after cloud continued to rise over their prospects, till it seemed as if they would become wholly involved in gloom.

There was yet, however, a bright spot or two, through which dawned rays of hope. On the farm, everything went on more and more satisfactorily: the flocks were once more in a healthy state; and the men, now in immediate and continual contact with their master, were going about their occupations in a straightforward and steady way. Within doors, also, the sheet-anchor of domestic enjoyment held fast: Mrs. Bracton kept on "the even tenour of her way," neither less active nor more impatient than at any other time; happy in being able perpetually to dispense comforts to those around her, and consoling all by the gentle benignity of her character.

Still the time wore on, and on, and on; yet Willoughby did not appear. A period much beyond that which he had been out before had now elapsed, but no vessel could be heard of that had spoken to his ship since he sailed from Port Jackson. The *Harponier*, moreover, was known to be a vessel which, though good in other points, was by no means in the best condition for meeting with heavy gales of wind, and such there had been. First, Mary's letters had carolled with hope and expectation; then, they manifested impatience and conviction that there certainly could not be any much longer delay of Willoughby's arrival, mingled, however, with acknowledgments that Reuben was constantly reminding her that she was misled by Willoughby's first speedy success, and was totally underrating the average duration of the voyage. But lovers know nothing about figures or averages. Finally, a fit of silence upon the subject ushered in forebodings so sad, so touching, so broken-hearted, that Katharine often shrank from reading a second time those portions of the letter where they had clustered most thickly.

Then came again an alleviating circumstance. A letter arrived from Charles: his fortitude had maintained itself till the dreaded day; nay, over the day: resting on the assurance in his own mind, and the explanation to his creditor, that some delay must have taken place; and that nevertheless the money would arrive. And now he proudly and fervently told them how sure he had been, the more and more as he reflected, that his father would never forsake him in his hour of need; and that after this it would be a very little while indeed before he should be with him. Then, under the impulse of awakened gratitude and filial feeling, he spoke (which was more to his parents than all) of the regret he felt for having allowed himself to be led from the straight path of rectitude into such an indiscretion. This letter Rachael was permitted to read as a sort of set-off against the former concealment and the fact itself; and before she had read to the signature, her tears were trickling down into the midst of the glowing words.

But how rarely does joy come without sorrow. If Rachael's heart yearned toward the character of her friend, much the most intensely as she supposed it to be embodied in the absent brother, it was an imprudence; the moral penalty of which lay registered on the scroll of a law that no hand can alter. Every fresh submission to the emotion brought with it a more trying solicitude about the result of the approaching crisis. She now, moreover, never left home; and when her friends spent a few hours with her there, those feelings of uneasiness with which we watch any diminution of respectful regard for those we love, caused her often to feel deep pain when Katharine and Marianna inevitably witnessed some of the ever fresh foibles of her aged parent. In some points, indeed, he had now quite lost sight of all his highest principles: like one wandering in darkness, he clung convulsively for support to whatsoever came to hand; be it what it might. The miserable spy, whose services he had secured, had become magnified in his estimation into an indispensable protector; so that oftentimes the three young women had to leave the sitting-room whilst the imbecile old man brought in this despicable character—who could only sneak in from the adjacent bush by stealth—and kept him there concealed, till he heard whatever tale the low felon had to tell; and then, giving him meat and drink and a supply of tobacco, employed his restless senile cunning to contrive a safe exit for the wretch into the shelter of the contiguous bush.

Yet, after all, these things were but the gathering of the thunder-cloud. Suddenly began to roll the peals that heralded the discharging of its deluge.

The warm beams of the fast-coming summer shone through the window into Rachael's little room, as she sat penning a note to her friend. The morning had been more than ordinarily bright and hot for the season; and such days in the climate of Australia are those which are found to be so oppressive. In the very aged, and such as labour under cerebral disease of any kind, their effect is to

produce a morbid sensibility and excitement. All the morning, Rachael had felt her attention irresistibly drawn to the more than ordinary restlessness of her aged parent: the feeble pilgrim of life's last stage, like one toil-worn to the utmost, was staggering through the last few steps between him and the goal of his mortal life. Yet to her understanding, inexperienced in these symptoms, there seemed no reason why he should not last a twelvemonth longer. All that a fond and dutiful daughter could do for her parent, she had done: all day long her eye had scarcely been off him a minute; she had stood and complacently listened and soothed him, as he childishly came over and over again, and consulted with her about the bills. He had eaten his mid-day meal heartily and with relish, and then gone to take repose in his room. Once, immediately after he had lain down, he rose again, and (as if without that he could not sleep) came back and kissed his daughter, and blessed her, laying his hand upon her head, as was his custom; and then went in again, and, as Rachael supposed, was fallen asleep.

At length she heard him uttering her name several times, amidst a confusion of words; speaking sometimes in English, but more frequently in the language of their forefathers: not as if he were calling to her, but as if addressing one whom he alternately congratulated and remonstrated with. Nor had his speech the incoherent and stumbling course of him who speaks in a dream: its tones had a clear, a thrilling, an agonizing meaning, as if inspired by some heart-rending theme; its sentiment was as appreciable as that of the death-march pealing at midnight from a band of trumpets. And still, as she held her breath, she heard her own name uttered again and again. Then congratulation seemed almost merged in remonstrance; the remonstrance once or twice almost rising into denunciation. And that was a tone of her father's voice so new and incredible to her, that she was at once sure something extraordinary must be taking place; and starting up in alarm, she ran in.

He was sitting on his bed-side, with his hat on, and his hands crossed upon the head of the staff he now always used, like one who had come in and sat him down to rest, on coming off a long journey. His eyes were closed; but his lips moved, though their utterance was not now audible. Some overwhelming thought agitated the whole man, but seemed as if it no more belonged to any region beyond him. Suddenly, as his daughter stood gazing and wondering, his words broke forth again, slowly and mournfully, yet resolutely.

"Oh, Ra-sha-el! Ra-sha-el! Vere ish my shild? I cannot do midout my shild!"

"My father! my father!" cried the maiden; "I am here, I am here! indeed I am:" and, as her tears burst passionately forth, she threw herself on her knees, and clasped the tottering frame of her father in her arms.

"Go avay! go avay!" cried the old man, impotently striking the floor with his staff.

Rachael lifted up her face, and gazed on him in breathless astonishment.

"Oh, Ra-sha-el!" he went on again; "de shild ish *not* mit me." And then he added, in a stern, impatient voice, "Haf you not got her mit you?" And then she understood that it was not to her, but to her mother, that he had been all along uttering his mournful appeals.

"My dear, dear father!" she cried, "I am here with you—at your side. There: it was I who kissed you then. We shall meet with your other dearer Rachael somewhere else, you know, by-and-by. Speak to me: open your eyes."

But the fond appeal reached not the departing spirit: already it was too far away: only the skirts of its retinue, a few disorderly thoughts, now lagged behind in the tenement it had been summoned to quit. She took his hat off his head, but he struggled feebly to retain it: the large veins of his brow were swollen with the effort; and crying out, mournfully, in the feeble, querulous tone of an infant, "It ish a long, long vay: bot I vill come again by-and-by. Ve cannot do midout de shild, Ra-sha-el"—he made a resolute effort to rise, supporting himself on the head of his staff. But in vain: he stopped—trembled—sank—fell back—and was no more!

CHAPTER XXXIII.

The Orphan Heiress—Oshee Simons and his Wife—Rachael's Apprehensions—Mary Kable's Despondency—Sorrows of the Bracton Family.

THE reader will recollect that we have now traced the life of the Hebrew maiden through several years. At the commencement of her acquaintance with the family at the Rocky Springs she was but eighteen years of age; she had now passed one-and-twenty. Neither natural nor conventional laws interposed any obstacle to her taking full control of the property she had become heir to by will. There were several arrangements, however, made by that will, which it is necessary to advert to.

Lazarus Moses had requested two merchants in Sydney, with whom he had for many years done business, to act as his executors. One of these was a gentleman of his own nation; the other of Gentile birth. After specifying the various modes in which his capital would be found invested, he directed, that as each transaction he was engaged in within the colony could be successfully brought to a termination, it should be done, and the sum thus accruing paid over to his daughter (all his just debts having first been liquidated). In another part of the document he gave Rachael

his advice respecting the further management and security of the property.

Almost without exception, these investments within the colony were found to be in the form of mortgage, and the periods themselves were yet far from complete. The amount advanced to Lieutenant Bracton was, with the solitary exception of a sum under a hundred pounds (a loan to a poor Jew), the only claim for which there was not the most ample freehold security.

His property in Europe also became his daughter's; but, of course, would not become available to her for some length of time. Finally, he advised Rachael not to relinquish the position he had secured, but to continue to carry on the business exactly as he had done.

Meantime, only a few weeks had elapsed since supplies to the amount of several hundred pounds had been forwarded from the stores of these executors in the capital: but no mention was made how the amount thus due was to be disbursed. There existed no particular agreement between the deceased and his creditors as to the term of credit; so that it was left in ambiguity whether the testator wished his executors to look to the usual remittances from Rachael, or to proceed at once to satisfy their claims on the payment of the bills. At the moment, the executors exhibited no particular anxiety upon the point; and they would probably, but for the interposition of a fresh motive, have allowed the matter to go on in its usual train.

After her father's death, Rachael became sensible of the necessity of having some one of her own sex in the house with her, and also of the assistance of male strength in the business; and the executors suggested to her to have a trustworthy man and his wife sent up from Sydney. As a matter of courtesy, the choice of these individuals was left by his co-executor to Mr. Abrahams; who, under the impression that it would be the most agreeable selection to Rachael, chose a young married couple of her own nation.

The choice, however, turned out eventually (though not discoverable for some time) to be most unfortunate. It was one of those cases which so constantly occur in the colony, of individuals on their arrival seeking service, and presenting testimonials of such transcendent excellence of character, as fairly to excite a suspicion that either they must be thoroughly worthless, or else the old world very much to blame for parting with them.

For the first few days after the arrival of Mr. and Mrs. Simons, Rachael felt, without discerning, that there was something amiss: and, benignant and compassionating as was her character, it would probably have been still longer before she did so, had not the keen eye and rapid intellect of her friend Marianna come in to her aid.

"I shall have everything much more orderly and nice for you in a few days, when you come to see me," observed Rachael to Marianna.

"I very much doubt it, my dear," said her friend.

"Why?"

"Oh, nothing."

"My helpers, you see, are new to the country, and both very young," continued Rachael.

"Old enough, if I possess any penetration at all," replied Marianna, still unable to stifle the expression of her dislike, "to have quite out-lived their self-respect."

"Ah! Marianna," said Rachael, "you are always so severe in your judgments. You really should not be so."

"The point is not whether I am severe, Rachael, but whether I am correct."

The softer and more pensive spirit of Rachael once more gave way before the sharper and more active temperament of her friend; and perhaps, on such occasions, there was even a hope lurking in the secret recesses of Rachael's mind that Marianna might always turn out to be right, and that Charles Bracton might turn out to be exactly like her. For now every day, as she thought of the future—the long, the doubtful, the lone future—Rachael felt, more and more keenly, that to find herself without one loving heart to rest upon would be dreadful. As yet there was but Marianna whom she could properly call *friend*: and Marianna would marry.

Mrs. Simons happened to overhear the final portion of Miss Bracton's commentary, and took an early opportunity of indoctrinating her husband into the sort of estimation in which they were both likely to be held. Hosea—or Oshee, as he was occasionally called by his wife—did not, however, take this greatly to heart in a moral point of view: he gave himself no trouble to be less frequently down at the public-house, nor scrupled any the more to use the opportunities he there obtained for replenishing his funds by "gaffing" with the settler's men he met with "on the spree." In fact, almost any other mistress, and quite every other master, would have begun seriously to demur both to the quantity of his work and the quality of his recreations, before he had become one of the ornaments of the township many days. Of Mrs. Simons less could be said in reprobation, but that little was quite ample, being what it was: she was simply one of the greatest trollops that can be conceived. If that particular quality shows abhorrently in the person of one woman more than another, it is when it appears in a female of the Jewish race: and as contrast brings out opposite properties with striking effect, Mrs. Simons enjoyed its full advantage when the eye turned suddenly from her mistress and rested upon herself. She did, however, it must be said, endeavour to maintain a show of respect for her mistress, which was more than her husband cared to do.

But if Hosea Simons paid no great attention to his mistress, and to the business at the store, he by no means neglected other parts of her affairs, with which he needed have had no concern: he

showed himself nowise deficient in activity respecting them. Mr. Abrahams had taken Hosea for what he was invoiced at from home, by some charitable but not too-highly principled member of the Hebrew race; and, speaking in the confidence which men naturally feel inclined to fall into in a foreign country, when conversing with persons of their own nation and their own faith (being totally unacquainted personally with Lieutenant Bracton and his family), he had casually mentioned the existence of the bills. Hosea Simons therefore, unmindful how easily, in a thinly-inhabited country, reports may be traced to their originators, now made "level chalks" with Miss Bracton, by promulgating his information at the public-house: with such rhetorical adornments as his fancy suggested. And conceiving the possibility that, if Mr. Abrahams and Miss Moses were no longer in a state of mutual confidence, she might cease to deal with Mr. Abrahams—who, chary of so good a mart, might then instal him into a rival store, Mr. Oshee thought fit to forward to Sydney, at every opportunity, insinuations (for which he had no better authority than his own constructiveness) that the young lady was, from inexperience, so negligent in her conduct of the business, and so ruinously regardless of her own interests, that Mr. Abrahams must not be surprised if the present state of things should shortly bring about their inevitable result.

The unsuspecting, because upright merchant, had no reason to doubt the integrity of his informant; quite the contrary: and—as Sydney merchants have no time to spare for monthly journeys of investigation up the country, and matters of business must be settled without many *pros* and *cons*—he had an interview with his co-executor on the subject. It was concluded between them that Lieutenant Bracton's bills would be required to be met, *in full*, at the legal period; when they would reimburse themselves, and hand over the balance to Miss Moses in proper form.

Rachael had earnestly urged upon the executors that Mr. Bracton's position being good in all points, and his means in reality unquestionable, no undue urgency should be shown in demanding payment of the bills; and the reception her request met with at the time, had been such, that she felt justified in communicating the most cheering expectations on this point to the family. But, within a few days of each other, Rachael received, first an intimation to the effect above specified from the executors, and then information from several parties who called at the store, that the existence of the loan was matter of general notoriety in the township. A more cautiously whispered rumour was added that Lieutenant Bracton would, in all probability, shortly be in the hands of those officials who have so long been renowned for the vulgarity of their title and the gentility of their acquaintance.

More distressing intelligence could not have reached Rachael; and as she glanced at the cause, that expression of Marianna's which had so deeply imprinted itself on her mind, arose to her

recollection. "Oh! Charles, Charles!" she exclaimed, with agonized feelings, when she reached her own little chamber; where, hiding her face in her hands, she sobbed as one whose nearest and deepest loves are threatened by a hurricane of hopeless desolation. But recovering herself, she recollected that not a moment was to be lost, and hastened to do what little was yet in her power to protect and assist those who had become more to her than herself.

In the interim, as may be supposed, the inmates of the cottage at the Rocky Springs shared in the feelings which agitated Rachael. First of all came the shock and the regret occasioned by the death of their friend's parent; then followed the anxiety and surmises about matters of business as affected by it: which, however, were allayed by the hope and contentment arising from Rachael's assurances that full time would be allowed for a final adjustment. And now was added the annoyance of the state of things brought about by Mr. Hosea. With these also were mingled solicitude about the young sailor, and impatient anticipations of his return.

Lieutenant Bracton's experience of sea life, and knowledge of his son's ability as a sailor, made him the least apprehensive of all concerned for Willoughby's safety; and yet by no means the least impatient for his arrival in port. The dial on which the sun of hope betokened its decline by the most marked shadow, was the heart of Mary Kablé. It no longer availed now that Reuben remonstrated; that he kindly traced out for her from the papers, the average duration of such voyages; that he reminded her how gaily and confidently she had once called in question the rumoured sensitiveness of Katharine. It is the very error of our race, that feeling has ever, from the first aberration to the last, overruled the dictates of the understanding. A settled despair was brooding over the spirit of the frank-hearted girl: already its shadow seemed fixed there, the grim precursor of itself. Misled by her lover's first speedy trip, alarmed by the utter absence of any intelligence of his ship, perpetually reminded, by the roar of the surf on the beach, of the awful power of the waves, and left in virtual solitude to the operation of all these influences, the sole relief her aching heart could find was to pour the mournful music of its lament into the ear of Katharine; till Katharine sometimes felt prompted to disregard every other consideration, and constraining her own private feelings, go and stay with her for a time.

"You say, dear Katharine," wrote Mary, in reply to an intimation in one of her friend's letters, "that you would make any sacrifice to have my company till Willoughby comes home. It is very kind of you to take it for granted that he will come home—very kind: *but I am almost certain now.* If anything would do me good, it would be to see *you*—you whom I love better than anybody I ever loved yet—except, indeed, where I am bound to love above all things,—and I suppose I ought also to say, than

Reuben; though I think I love you and him just alike: but I love him all the more as it comes out how much he loves you. I might always have seen he did, if I had bethought myself: I know his way so well. If anything is filling his whole mind, that is the very thing he never will utter a syllable about. But instead of thinking of this, I used to be very vexed with him when he would not let me talk to him about you; and, especially after you were gone that time, it was quite painful for some days to be in the house with him. I never could talk about you with Margaret but he used to be off somewhere for the rest of the day. I can't help laughing when I think of how I found him out. Old Jemmy said, one morning (with an air I shall never forget) when I was talking to him, 'So then, miss, master'll be married, I suppose, shortly.' 'Married, Jemmy!' I said; 'you've got hold of the newspaper first this time, indeed! What do you mean?' 'Why, from what Mr. Reuben said, miss,' 'What did he say, then, Jemmy?' 'Oh, I and him was yarning about Mrs. Bradshawe, miss; and I said what a good woman she'd been in this house; and master said, in that quick, gruff way he has when he means a thing,—'Never was a better woman on these waters, Jemmy, than Margaret, and never will be; except that young lady that was visiting with us a little while ago,—Miss Katharine Bracton: she's what I call the tip-topper of this world for everything a woman ought to be; and so, seeing master was so much more silenter than he used to be, I guessed the rest.' So, when Reuben came in, I said, quite quietly to him, 'What news do you think I've heard to-day?' 'Fresh family of cats, or what?' 'Cats!—no; something you'll be pleased with as well as me. Katharine is going to be married.' Poor fellow, I really pitied him. But as I had once found it out so far, he never was very resolute in making me hold my tongue about you afterwards. So, ever since I can see it plainer and plainer every day: these messages he has given me for you lately, make me quite certain."

All this was balm to Katharine's heart. Still, it widened the foundation for the scruples and speculations already rapidly rising in her mind. Amongst other things, it answered the very opposite purpose her correspondent intended it for; she felt still less inclined to visit Mary than she had done when listening to the simple appeal of her sorrows. And, again, it urged upon Katharine's sensitive and finely harmonized mind the duty of being explicit as to the unpleasant events amidst which her family might yet have to stand publicly observed. She felt, however, that if Reuben really loved her, he would love her more under such a humiliation rather than less: she looked to him to do so: it was her claim upon him, if he gave her the title to have any claim at all.

It was very shortly after the receipt of this letter from Mary, that Rachael, receiving the executor's communication, sent her post-haste messenger over to the cottage to ask Marianna and her cousin to come over to her "immediately, if possible." As Rachael

had no conveyance of her own, such was now the usual way in which any sudden councils were called amongst them: and the messenger finding them unoccupied, Marianna and Katharine were at the township long before he could get back thither.

The result of the conference was, a determination on Rachael's part to despatch to the executors a remonstrance against what she could not but consider a breach of good faith; on Marianna's part to hasten to inform her father; and on Katharine's to lose not a minute (for the period limited was now nearly expired) in making a full and frank communication of the case to Mary, and, consequently, to Reuben—enforcing the full accomplishment of her object by an express caution to Mary as to the impropriety of concealing it from her brother.

On returning home, Marianna and Katharine found that the object of their journey was already in course of achievement through another train of circumstances. The same post out of Sydney that brought the apologetic communication from the executors to Rachael, had also brought a civil intimation to Lieutenant Bracton, that, in consequence of the position of the affairs of the estate, his bills, on becoming due, would be considered an important resource; and, being of such large amount, not capable of being neglected. The letter-carrier had delivered the communication almost immediately after their departure; and Lieutenant Bracton, sensible that no time must now be lost, and that no resource remained for warding off so important a crisis but that of placing the deeds of his lands *in vadio* with the executors, had once more torn himself away from the aged and flurried partner of his life's troubles and enjoyments, and was already many miles on his road to Sydney.

Sorrowfullest of evenings was that one to them all: Rachael more restless, cheerless, and nerveless than she had ever been before; Marianna perplexed and wounded by the premature and unnecessary rumour of what would yet, in all probability, be prevented, but feeling on its account careless of any further attempt to fulfil her promise of writing to Mr. Hurley; Katharine compelled to write to Mary, but unable to decide what to say, yet ever and anon cheered and reinspirited by those brilliant radiations of heavenly light that are given to illumine the souls of the faithful and pure-hearted, when they are bewildered and imperilled by earthly gloom; and Mrs. Bracton, too—poor aged lady! without one selfish sorrow of her own, the mirror that reflected in its clear surface the saddened images of them all. Agitated, indeed, were her thoughts. The strong old oak, beneath the shelter of whose rooted strength she felt half to live, moved aside by the rush of the hurricane, till its head no longer overhung hers, she seemed now left, as it were, to look up without earthly shelter, to the cold and awful lights above. Katharine still so gentle and faithful, and yet so restless; Marianna changed from the high-hearted, the passionate, the fearless, into a broken-spirited invalid;

Willoughby's fate in uncertainty; Charles's morals (and, the mother thought—*if his morals, his all*) in peril, and he himself unhappy till he could meet them, and see that they forgave him. Rachael a sad (and might it not be) only a too beautiful orphan! Altogether it was a panorama of sorrow such as she had never been placed amidst before. It seemed as if the evil of her days were all reserved for their close. Where—when—how was the complicated disaster to end?

To and fro went Katharine to her chamber. That letter must be written—must be sent. But what was she to write? In what words should she tell the tale? How begin? With such a large sum so irrevocably abstracted from them, would Reuben Kable regard them in the same light as heretofore? "Oh, yes," she said, "he was too good to think anything of that." But if no arrangement should be effected about the bills!—though, indeed, was not the public slur cast on them already? and would not he, in all probability, have already heard of it from some of his friends going down the country? Still the letter must be written. Prudence and honour, and every moral motive pointed to it. And yet the evening passed by, and supper was over, and the hour for retiring came; and still there was nothing written but the date, and "Dearest Mary."

Nor was it till long after midnight that that letter was completed: but then it was explicit and faithful, and full of the breathings of a heart submissive to the will of Heaven. Many a tear had sprung forth as there had had to be penned (perhaps for the last time) those words, no more of stiff and measured thanking, but of tender, love-invoking gratitude to the brave and manly brother of her friend, "for rescue from a death of deaths; for all his goodness; and even Mary, for his very company." But it was accomplished, nevertheless. And then Katharine would not read it over, or allow herself to scrutinize even her own knowledge of its contents: she had written only what she knew to be true—what she felt to be right. The seal and the address were affixed, and she felt that the die of her destinies, for joy or sorrow, henceforth was irrecoverably cast.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Turpin Charles—Oshee at Peter Burnes's—Beck's Desperation and Vindictiveness—The Renegade's Flight—Pursuit—Rachael's Orisons—Alarm and Resolve.

DAY was almost breaking when the vigil ceased. Yet soon after sunrise John Thomas was summoned to the cottage door where the lady who had kept it stood impatiently awaiting him. A man was wanted to start immediately down the country: h

must be well horsed, and must be the one who could be best trusted for not stopping on the road to drink. Who would it be? One of the last hands hired? A shake of the head followed: according to their own vaunting over the nightly pipe, they were each of them hard drinkers. The best man the Welshman could think of was one of the oldest hands; an individual already mentioned as the Considerate Man. His name, contrarily enough, was Charles Turpin; and his hut mates, to make it more contrary still and complete the joke, had long since reversed it for him, calling him Turpin Charles.

In the rough and ready custom of the place and time, half an hour sufficed to finish the equipments for a journey of far on towards a thousand miles; and in less than that time, the messenger was horsed, rationed, commissioned, and off. But if hard drinking was not amongst the vices of Turpin Charles, long gossiping was; and, as he rode along by Peter Burnes's, the temptation to "get some sort of a notion who this new Jew chap was, and try whether he knowed the quarter he came out of,"—was irresistible: in a half minute more the bridle was hung on the horn of a tree, and the rider, standing just outside a circle of spectators; in the midst of which was Oshee, face to face with an antagonist, whose pockets he was rapidly emptying by his skill, acquired through many a year's hard study of the evolutions of three penny pieces in the air; or, as he himself would have designated the game, "three-up."

Five minutes followed five minutes, and still the play went on and on it might have gone till noon, without Turpin Charles getting a chance to have a yarn with his "towney," but that, unfortunately, the "luck had changed." Oshee was winning everything before him, before his townsman came up; and then the parties began to run on "toss for toss" without advantage on either side. Till, at length, Oshee sprang up in a passion and addressed him spontaneously:—

"Here, now, my goot fellow; I just gif you half-a-crown to go avay: I haf never had a bit of luck since you come and shtand and look at de play. You haf got a evil eye."

The flash sally produced a peal of laughter amongst the bystanders; and gave the loser, who thought he had already lost enough, an opportunity of sneaking away without derision. The other parties, who were chiefly idlers without money, or companions of him who was thus dissipating his twelvemonth's wages, dispersed; and the two Londoners were left standing together; Oshee reckoning what he was "to the good, that time."

"Pretty well, isn't it?" said Turpin. "I suppose them in the left-hand pocket's the lot this time."

"Vere are you from?" inquired Oshee, instantly stopping his calculations.

"Oh, the Dials, lad," said Turpin. "I guessed we should make one another out."

"Make von anoder out! Vy do you tink as I don't recollect you? ay, ven I vos that high, my poy," holding his hand about three feet from the ground. "Here; vosn't your name Conkey? Vosn't dat dere your shtall——"

"Well, well, lad," said Turpin, interrupting him. "I see as you know all about it——"

"Vy, I recollects as vell vat you vas lagged for——"

"No need of talking about that," interrupted Turpin, hastily. "'Tisn't the custom here."

"Here! Ish dere any need to drive de ducks to vater? Don't I know? Can you shee any green in my eye? Dere ish nopody apout here vat know me; only you: and ve'll leave 'em sho. I shay: going to shtand half-a-pint?"

"Just the very thing I got off my horse for," said the Considerate Man: and in they went.

Turpin Charles delayed only another quarter of an hour; neither did he drink to any excess: but during the short time he stopped, he had told all his own business (avouching it by the production of the letter), and had heard all Oshee had to say about the store and its affairs; not failing, as the cunning, dissolute, and mischievous young Jew "put things together," to help him out with his conclusions.

Oshee had observed Rachael's excitement the day before, after reading the letter; he had taken that letter in, and saw that it was in Mr. Abrahams's handwriting; he knew of the urgent summons sent to Marianna and Katharine; that Mr. Bracton was gone to Sydney in great haste; and now further, that this messenger was going in as great haste to Brisbane Water: and finally, he knew (no one better) what reports he had himself transmitted to Mr. Abrahams. And when, in addition to this, Turpin informed him who Miss Kable was, and that her brother had for some time taken upon himself the control of the farm, and was Willoughby's partner and a monied man, he directly comprehended the critical position of Lieutenant Bracton's affairs, and that the family were making efforts to extricate themselves from the difficulty: and he concluded, as matter of course, by Reuben's agency.

But the mischief Hosea Simons did was always wanton mischief: there was no system or tenacity in his purposes. In this respect he was an exception to the general character of his race. The ambition of setting up a rival store was already forgotten in the more attractive occupation of playing "three up." At first, this had been a forbidden pleasure; but as soon as he found Rachael was not a person to look very sharp after him, he gave himself full license, and was now almost always at the public-house. All thoughts of becoming a storekeeper had subsided; and he made the whole affair the matter of a gossip with Peter Burnes; chuckling at intervals, as he thought how easily he had got up this piece of mischief.

"I shay, Peter, here: I could tell you someting, if had a mind. How eashy it ish to make a pishtol go off ven once it ish at full cock!" said Mr. Simons, with a depth of complacency.

But that part of the communication the publican did not understand; the other part he did. Moreover, he immediately saw its bearing on his own interests; supposing the fact to be as the Jew stated.

"This Kable, I judge," he said, "is going to be asked to buy the farm, in case it is seized and sold; and if he does, and comes and lives up here, there'll be hot wars between him and them chaps that's out in the bush along with the black, before many weeks is over. I've heard tell of Master Kable: he'd let 'em alone till they meddled with him or his, and then, if it was only a pin's point, he'd hunt 'em to the other end of the world."

The point where Peter Burnes felt his own interest to be involved was this: the gang sent in at various times for considerable quantities of spirits, which, as they could not help themselves, and the connexion was not a perfectly safe one, he supplied in just such a degree of combination with water as the conscience of the hour suggested. His countryman, Dubbo, was the messenger from the bush, and Warraghi betwixt him and the gang. Burnes sold his rum, and Dubbo got a good drink left him, without joining in the fortunes of the outlaws, and the gang got what they wanted. It was one of those little knots of connexion for general convenience which all parties concerned are always so jealous of having interfered with: the foe of one is the foe of all. Mr. Peter Burnes, therefore, immediately ordered his man to saddle the horse and ride over and tell Dubbo he wanted to see him directly.

Dubbo came in soon after noon; but offered his countryman little assistance. He had left off, he said, having anything to do with cross-work, and he didn't mean to begin again; if he should get into it for the past, he couldn't help it; he must only stand it as well as another. All he ever had to do with the gang now, was what Burnes knew as well as himself: somebody put some money down at a place close to his hut, and, judging that whoever left it there wouldn't mind finding it changed into a glass of grog, he just accommodated the gentleman (whoever he might be) and rode into the township, and bought it of Mr. Burnes, he being his countryman; but as to having anything to do with the gang and their plans, he neither should nor would. This, however, was, to a certain extent, a falsehood. He held himself aloof from them as much as he could; but at times every one among them came to his hut: principally his old comrade, Warraghi. Warraghi was to be at his hut that very day; and when they met, Dubbo put him in full possession of all he had heard from Mr. Peter Burnes.

Meantime, the messenger from the Rocky Springs was making his way down the country as fast as his habits permitted.

Toward the close of the same afternoon, Mr. Hurley retired from the court-house of his new district, perusing, with very conflicting feelings, a letter, received along with the Sydney despatches of that day, from his widowed mother in England. In it she represented to him how aged and spiritless she was now becoming: how many years she had watched over him, her only child; and how hard a lot it was now to be left to contemplate the final hour in solitude. If he had prospered, or saw that he should prosper, so far as to desire to fix his home in the land where he now was, she would come out to him: it might be rather a toilsome duty at her age; but, if everything else went well, the fatigue would be amply compensated by the pleasure of adding the whole of her little independence at once to his means. If he had not yet settled satisfactorily and would return to her, there would still remain at his command the same sum she annually remitted him, and the same literary pleasures and professional avocations as before he went abroad; and they would be together.

Grieved and mortified equally by the still protracted silence of Marianna, and almost concluding that she had never felt any serious affection for him, Mr. Hurley felt half inclined to give up a hope which seemed every day more and more baseless, and refrain from imposing upon his aged parent so serious an undertaking as the voyage. The more he meditated, the more difficult decision became; and when the setting sun shone in through his window, and the youngsters of the settlement were beginning to give vent to the shouts that mark the last gambols of the day, he gave up all further attempt to decide for the time, and taking up his hat, made his way to one of the cool paths that skirt the river side.

At this same hour, too, Warraghi was making his way to the Bason of Rocks, with the tidings he had heard from Dubbo. The latter, knowing, as he said, "that he couldn't be doing wrong," had brought out a gallon on speculation, and Warraghi, undertaking to make the adequate deposit with him hereafter, and leaving him a bottle full for himself, now had an unexpected boon to confer on his mates.

Beck was the first to observe Warraghi's approach as he and his party sat round the fire at the mouth of the Ghibber Gunyah, partaking of their supper. Since the plunder of the Ghiagong store, other robberies, no less daring and successful, had been perpetrated at private settlers' homesteads; flour and sugar, tea and tobacco were plentiful, and they were living, as the common phrase expresses it, "like fighting cocks." The police, however, no longer headed by a shrewd and active super-

intendent like Mr. Hurley, had never been able to run them down.

"Sold out once more and got the money!" ejaculated their leader, with a shout that went chattering in low, dead echoes round the rocks; and, jumping up with his knife in one hand and bread and meat in the other, he exclaimed, "Here comes the best little donkey that ever went in panniers: he can hardly waddle along under his load."

All sprang up and looked across the ragged surface of the sunken flat, where nearly midway, Warraghi was to be seen advancing, with his saddle placed on his head, his hat held by the rim between his teeth, and a couple of bottles under each arm. He was not expected to bring anything home; his visit having been merely one of old acquaintanceship to his "pal;" the good fortune, therefore, had a double zest.

"Now, we'll have no drinking before supper's done," continued Beck, as soon as the matter was explained: "Every man finish his supper before there's a single bottle broached. Set to work, Warraghi; it's a capital bit of beef: we had a job, though, to get her where we could bring her down without having too far to fetch it home. We've let the two forequarters hang up in a tree till the morning."

Beck had become fierce, unblenching, and reckless. Having dwelt in the colony from his childhood, his first impressions of a felon's lot were received at a period of the settlement when none of the principles of penal discipline now recognised were talked of; nay, when those acted upon were such as no one has ever ventured to put into print: such as are now to be heard of only rarely and in the legends of "first or second Fleeters." His horror of a felon's lot, therefore, brought with it desperation, and prompted him to maddest resistance.

The reports that were brought home at various times by the several members of the party when they went on solitary expeditions, were so many, and often so conflicting, that at last they paid very little heed to one another's stories, and such talk was out of fashion. Dubbo had told his visitor what he had heard at the township: but not at all in the same spirit as the publican had communicated it to him; and Warraghi, seeing in it nothing that directly affected the gang, forgot the subject as he made his meal, and even for a considerable time after the carouse began. At length, however, there was a pause for want of something to talk about, and some one asked who'd "spin a yarn;" and then he thought of it.

"I didn't tell you yet," he said, "what Dubbo's been telling me, Martin. You know what we heard the other day about your old cove's farm being likely to get into the hands of the sheriff? Dubbo says he heard to-day at the township, that the old chap himself is gone off down the road like mad; and

there's been a council of war among the women, and they've sent off a messenger post-haste for that long countryman of yours; and the letter was in Miss Kitty's hand-writing. What do you think of that? There must be something up now that's not easy, and no joke."

"I'll lay any money," said Morgan, "they've sent to the Corn-stalk to lend 'em the money; else they want him to buy the farm himself. Don't you remember, Martin, what we heard of his saying to the men directly after you and I started —that he wouldn't see the old man beat, whatever it might cost him, because he showed him the farm?"

Hitherto the black had said nothing: his choler at the prospect that arose before him, aggravated as it was by the recollections of the past, drove the blood into his head with such vehemence, that, but for the hissing within his ears he was deaf, and blind but for the sheets of flame that flashed before his eyes. At length he spoke, gutturally, almost in a roar:—

"Countryman here or countryman there, I'll make that fellow mind his own business, as sure as ever I can get my heavy hand upon him. A precious nice neighbour! Why, men, he wouldn't leave us sitting here three weeks. No, no! No, no! It's enough that he's spoilt my luck once: he never shall again. I'll be before-hand with him this time."

Here Beck paused, but looked round at no man: he still sat just as when he first broke silence; only that, as he ceased to speak, he began to twirl round the piece of stick he held between his thumb and finger. So different was the voice in which he had spoken from his usual tone of voice, that there was not an eye able to withdraw itself from him, and not a tongue offered to break the silence.

"Drink up that rum," he said at last. "Work before play, any time! When do you say this letter went?" he inquired, turning to Warraghi.

"That I can't say," said Warraghi; "but I judge it was yesterday, or the day before." The reader will recollect, however, that it was that very morning.

"We've never had toll out of the skipper's stores yet; and if we don't make haste now we never shall," proceeded Beck; "so we'll just make a sweep there, and get it home. And then we'll go and camp in Bargo Brush, or among the rocks down the river, and catch Mister Kable as he's coming up the country, and make him take his jacket off, and give him fifty with a stirrup-leather. We're sure to catch him if we only look out on the Sydney side of Jack Lupton's: he always stops there one night, and we can let him get well on the next morning into that wild piece of bush about seven or eight miles on this side, and then pull him up."

"And for the last half-dozen," adjoined Marcus Theophilus

George, in his capacity as rival leader of the gang, "turn the buckle end of the strap."

But the poor shallow-brained renegade little understood the materials he was now sporting with: what a change had come suddenly over the strong mind whose supremacy he had disputed; how mind communicates impulse, as it were contagiously, to mind; and how ferociously the black's soul was now thirsting for revenge on his countryman for that night of peril, loss, and contempt. The attempt of Marcus to supplant Beck had for some time come to nothing with all but himself: the more he had become known, the more he had been despised; till now, even his own followers looked to the black as their leader. Scarcely had he uttered his addendum to Beck's decree, when, with a yell of agony, he sprang up, and rushed headlong through the fire to the other side. Morgan, who sat behind him, with the bowl of his pipe glowing hot, had quietly taken it out of his mouth, and laid it on his bare neck.

"How do *you* like foul play, master?" asked the stockman, with a cool, quiet chuckle: "isn't it enough that the sentence is passed, without your adding to it?"

Morgan Brown said and did this, not because he cared in the slightest degree about whether foul or fair play was decreed to the young Australian; but because he knew it would please the black, and was impatient at the interference of one whom they would all have been glad to send adrift, but that they suspected he was playing false.

The discussion went on, and the arrangements were settled, and the following night was fixed for the attempt. In this fresh excitement, the liquor itself almost ceased to be prized, and was drank prodigally, in heavy draughts, with short intervals: then nothing further remained but to sleep off its effects, and "be ready for a start."

Marcus lay down among the sleepers: but it was with no intention of sleeping. He cared not how soon he got himself into a position of security; for he was fully sensible of having become an object of aversion to the fierce ruffians around him: though he had neither desire nor design of amending his principles. He had ventured into the township but twice since the death of the old Hebrew. On one of these occasions he had been able to catch sight only of Mr. Hosea Simons, whose reception of him was such as not to lead him to desire a repetition of it. On the previous occasion, he had seen Rachael; when—her father being but lately deceased, and she almost as yet under a sense of acting for him—she had given the poor wretch some tobacco and food, and had remonstrated with him, and implored him to abandon his evil ways before it was too late: but the man had given himself up to be the slave of selfishness, and of all the lower propensities: and whilst he pro-

mised to consider of it, it was only as he exulted to himself, when he got away, "to keep her on a towing line as long as he could: such a chance wasn't to be got every day."

It was evident to him, however, that his begging business would soon be a very bad one, and that his thieving connexion was a very dangerous and unpleasant one; and he had a conviction that now, if ever, was the opportunity of "selling" his comrades to advantage. The deep, lethargic slumbers that presently came over the rest of the party afforded him the desired opportunity. Cautiously extricating himself from the crowd of sleepers, he listened, and looked to see if any one turned to observe him; then drawing on his boots, he searched for the best jacket that he could find about, and in a moment more he was out from underneath the rock, and following headlong through the darkness the beckoning hand of fate.

There was no moon, but the course to the river was not a perplexing one: the river bank itself was guidance sufficient for many miles, and then there was a road. The way was not long that night to him: he sang as he went; nay, laughed again, and humorously parleyed with himself as the echoes called back to him. And should he not laugh? Would he not now, by the disclosure of this plot, commend himself to people who would secure him immunity? What a rig! Why it was like cheating the devil! Who but he? And faster and more merrily he bounded along. He had to pass close to Dubbo's hut, where his misery had extorted from him many a feed. If the dogs had not jumped up and barked, he might have gone in and lit his pipe:—but what odds? he had some matches: and who'd bother with Dubbo's dogs now? On he goes; and laughs, and shouts, and smokes, and sings. Five men traced and taken, or shot by the police!—Pshaw! Sha'n't he be safe himself? Perhaps in one of the swell's kitchens. The daylight breaks over the hills: Ghiagong is quite close. *He's* not afraid of going into the township *now: he's* about to be on the same side as the police themselves! Hurrah! hurrah!

The day was indeed dawning—his last. Sometime after midnight Beck had opened his eyes, and the deep gloom under the rock told that the fire required renewing. As he passed the spot where Marcus usually slept, he missed him; but he thought no more of it for the instant: the man might have risen to light his pipe. Beck gathered the ends of the logs together on the ashes, and looked round:—no Marcus. "Hoy! Marcus George, the Scholar!" No answer; but that of some ill-voiced bird, that had started shrieking at the sudden alarm, and almost fell from his perch up in a tree on the hill-side. Then dead silence. "Marcus!"—again, again, and again shouts the black, half-maddened with the suspicion that is forcing itself upon him. One—another,—all are out by the

fire. "Oh, he's gone! We might have been sure of this long ago, if we hadn't been easy fools. What's to be done?"

"We must have him, men: it's his life or ours, now!" exclaims the black, with fierce determination. "Let's find our horses as quick as we can, and then hot haste for the township. You two on foot be off directly. Keep the regular track till we come up, and then we'll give you a lift till we get nigh hand the township: there we'll all separate, and cut him off. We're sure to be there before he can get there a-foot."

But it was later on in the night than they thought, and the horses were not found till after a long search.

Meanwhile their treacherous companion had travelled between two strong engines—Hope in front, and Fear behind. When Marcus got into Ghiagong the store door was still closed, and no one was about in the township; but the birds were already beginning to pipe and twitter, and play about on the grass in the thin golden rays that shot almost horizontally along through the fresh air. He walked round the store:—there was a window a few inches open at the back. He creeps along on tiptoe, and standing hidden at the side, listens awhile: a voice of simple, unequivocating entreaty is heard, sometimes pausing. He stoops and looks in: a lady, in deep mourning, kneels, her face partly turned away from the window: a rich shawl bearing large many-coloured flowers on an open milk-white ground is thrown over her mourning robe; and heavy tresses of jetty black, escaped from the comb, fall down far upon it. A little gilt-edged volume lies by her side on the sofa. Again she pleads: again she pauses to listen for and comprehend the heaven-sent answer. The beauteous sight doesn't move the man. No! his callous soul has only thought of self—self—self. Creeping cautiously away, he goes round to the front, and raps loudly, again and again, on the door. He knows what he is doing: he knows whom that rude knock will startle from holiest attitude; but he feels nothing save his own despicable exultation and confidence. At length a cheerful and almost lute-like voice is heard from within, inquiring, "Who is there?"

"Me, ma'am."

"I don't know you. Who are you?"

"If you'll just put your ear to the key-hole, ma'am, I'll tell you. Do you recollect the man ould Mr. Moses asked to come and tell him if ever Martin Beck and the rest was coming this way again? Well, they're coming: only it's to the settlers that live at the Rocky Springs; and I don't know them: but everybody says you're very thick wid 'em."

Such an intimation was sufficient. The door was instantly opened; and, trembling and almost sick with dread, Rachael heard out the tale. She thought it seemed too real to be neglected: yet how could she call on the police without sur-

rendering her authority? And if the poor debased creature, she thought, were once in their power, and they were disappointed of the gang, would they not consign him to punishment? And if he were thus intimidated, would he not tell all he knew; and, among other things, how her poor father, in the indiscretion of his second childishness, had often harboured him? Uncertain what to do for the best, she gave him some food, and told him to go back into the bush, and keep out of sight till night, and then come to her again.

Rachael closed and barred the door again, and hurried into her chamber, and threw herself on the sofa where she had lately been kneeling. Long, long and wretchedly, she pondered over the tidings: but that which is within us is created to be fostered till it conquers that which is without. The evil at last forget that there are flowers, and melodies, and light; the good that there is darkness or a storm. She rose at length, pacified by faith, and nerved to the resolve that she would follow the straight path. She determined to go over instantly and lay the whole matter before Mrs. Bracton and her beloved friends Marianna and Katharine. It was really their case, not hers; and if they said the man ought unquestionably to be secured, then, whatever slur it might bring on herself by implication, she would urge him to give himself up. To carry out this determination, she must obtain a horse and a companion through the bush. Oshee was becoming so much his own master, that she shrunk from disturbing him to assist her in either way. The old porter, however, lived at one of the huts in the middle of the green, and she put her bonnet on and aroused him. One of the fencers who worked for the township was a cheerful, plain man, and knew her well enough, as he had been there several years; and he had a brood mare running close by. On sending to him he said, "Miss Rachael was welcome to anything he had in the world, excepting his saw and his morticing axe; and them two he wouldn't lend to his own father." There were several new side-saddles among the store-goods; so, without waiting for breakfast, Rachael (to the great perplexity of Mr. and Mrs. Simons), with the old porter on foot as escort, hurried off upon her mission.

CHAPTER XXXV.

Consultation — A Demand on the Welshman — Katharine's Letter to Reuben — Rachael's Anticipations — The Renegade's Exultation — His Capture by the Gang — Trial — Sentence — Execution — Katharine's Midnight Musings.

DEEPLY alarmed herself, and largely endowed with that reflectiveness and earnestness of character which secures attention from other minds, Rachael communicated all her own terrors to the listening and breathless party of females at the cottage. The facts themselves also, were calculated to terrify them even more than her: it was themselves personally who were threatened; and they had contemplated Beck closer than she had, and could more completely realize what his threats meant.

"There is no doubt," Marianna said, "but that man, who has given you the information, ought to be secured, Rachael; without him we have no ground for demanding such assistance from the police as they must give us, to be of any service at all."

"Katharine," asked Rachael, "what do *you* think? You say nothing."

"I don't know what to say," replied Katharine, feebly.

"Dearest Kate; don't fret so. If you think it best that these sad disclosures should be risked"—and here the orphan Hebrew maiden paused herself: her utterance became choked; and she wept; then, with a sigh, went on. "My poor dear father is in his grave: all that they may say of him cannot hurt him now. And as for myself, I'll bear it patiently, freely, thankfully, if it will be of any service in saving you."

"Mr. Bracton must be sent for, my dears," said the aged lady. "What are the police in such a crisis? Besides, your papa would never forgive me if I didn't send for him."

"Papa's coming, mamma," said Katharine, "won't prevent their waylaying Mr. Kable: and I do think," she added, in a confusion they all could see was as painful to her as it was uncommon—"I do think it is very likely he may come, when he hears from Mary what a sudden difficulty has again presented itself in our affairs."

"My dear, I think Mr. Kable is quite a match for Martin and all his gang. He is not a child, you know."

"Yes," said Katharine, as she sat, resting her elbows on the arms of the chair, partly covering her face with her beautiful white hands; "and so he'll think himself, and fight, and they'll shoot him."

They all felt that there was but too much probability in

this, from what they had discerned of the two Australians' characters.

"I wouldn't have any harm come to Mr. Kable, for the world," said Mrs. Bracton; now, for the first time, seriously attending to that part of the case.

"No more would Katharine," said Marianna, seriously and lovingly, yet mischievously.

There was a painful pause of some instants. New light seemed to be breaking in upon Mrs. Bracton: she seemed gratified, and yet uneasy; and her eyes wandered toward Rachael with an expression of impatience, as if she wished she hadn't been there.

"My love," said Mrs. Bracton, in a quiet commonplace tone (evidently, however, an assumed one), as her glance again passed quickly over Rachael: "*our friend*, Mr. Kable, will not provoke them rashly to such an extreme as that."

"*Indeed he will!*" replied Katharine, with a quickness and decision of tone that completely neutralized any effect Mrs. Bracton might have intended to produce on Rachael; but elicited from her younger friends their mutual assent.

The tale and the consultation had occupied upwards of an hour, and yet they had come to no decision. At length Rachael forgetting all her own feelings, in sympathy and love for the only individuals of her sex (save her lost mother) who had invited that love by their treatment of her, said,—

"Well, I shall tell this poor wretch to give himself up to the police. You will then, at all events, have complete personal security: they cannot refuse, on hearing his tale and being conducted to the haunt of the gang (even if they should escape), to believe that there is such a design against you, and send you a commensurate protection."

"Still," said Marianna, with a seriousness that betrayed how deeply she now entered into the newly-discovered feelings of her cousin, "the other part of the threat must not be overlooked. What is to be done about Reuben?"

"Why," replied Rachael, "you must let your messenger who goes down to Sydney to tell Mr. Bracton, go on to Brisbane Water and warn Mr. Kable."

"That will do," said Marianna. "I think there can be nothing better than that," she added, unconsciously directing the point of her speech upon Katharine.

"No; nothing better," said Katharine, as unconsciously answering, in complete forgetfulness of everything else at the attainment of her all absorbing object.

Marianna betook herself to write a letter to her father, whilst Katharine proceeded once more to demand horse and man from the blunt Cambrian, now overseer.

"I want you to stand my friend again, Thomas," said the young lady, as soon as she could venture to expose her

features to his gaze. "The *best horse* and the *best man* on the farm; no matter what the horse is at, or what the man is at."

"Miss! how could I be overseer if the man and the horse is take away like this? I always was your friend, Miss; but the 'ork must be done. The master come home by-and-bye, and then what 'ood she say if I have got nothing to show?"

"*I'll* put all that to rights, John. It's a very serious affair —more serious than the neglect of a twelvemonth's work. We've had information that Martin is coming to attack the station with his gang; and ——"

"Tam her! Oh, she is coming again, is she? Tam her. Oh, I have a cut at her at last, then!" and the eyes of the Cambrian glittered in his head, and every limb seemed about to depart from his body in different directions.

"Don't cherish such a foolish and wicked spirit," said Katharine. "It is only safety that we want, not revenge. Poor man! his day will come: soon enough for us, and much too soon for himself."

"I settle that man myself. I knock any man down that meddle with her when she come," cried the agitated Cambrian, incapable of controlling himself.

"Well," proceeded his young mistress: "you must do what I tell you——"

"I have not got any man: every man that is on the farm now is drink very hard; and never go to Sydney till she have first sell the horse on the road," said John Thomas, still obstinately pursuing his design of letting the black make his experiment. "Besides, there is no horse but the young horse Mr. Reuben, the native, have pick out for you, Miss, when she was here; and she tell me, Miss, before she go away, I am to get it shod and ride it a little myself, and not let anybody else have it to spoilt it till she come to Manaroo next, and then she will break it in nicely for you herself."

"Oh yes, yes," cried Katharine; "that will do: send *that* horse."

Checked and overawed, and persuaded by the soft but impassioned tones in which she spoke, the Welshman began to collect himself and recollect what Reuben had so strenuously inculcated upon him over and over again—that his first duty in all great emergencies was, *to obey*.

"Well, Miss, I fetch her in myself, directly: she is shod a little while ago; and she go like the wind when she like. But there is never a man but drink like a fish:—I tell you."

"What is to be done? Where can a man be got?" cried Katharine, trembling again with fresh apprehension.

"I tell you what you do, Miss, Send a black fellow: there is ever so many now up at the hut."

"But, *to be trusted?*"

"Oh yes. Young Tommy often go to Sydney along with me. I make her understand anything: always could. I often leave her to take care of my dray on the road all day, while I look for my cattle. And you know she never drink, because she cannot get any money. She go if I ask her."

"Well, do; and let me know: and let everything be ready as quickly as possible."

But as Katharine turned in again to the cottage, she bethought herself that, though the aboriginal lad might make a good messenger to carry a letter to Sydney, he might yet prove a very incompetent channel of oral communication to Brisbane Water. Yet, evidently, there was no one else to be trusted in comparison, so far as his abilities went. What then was to be done? There must be a letter for him to carry on, after his Sydney mission was performed. Besides, that would best ensure his making no mistake or forgetting the names of the parties and place he was to go to.

All was hurry and dismay at the cottage, from Mrs. Bracton to Biddy, who remembered but too well the day of the inroad of the aborigines. Katharine withdrew to the quietude of her own chamber, and endeavoured there to pen a few rapid lines to Mary: but when she came to read them over, they appeared to reveal too much feeling on her own part; yet they by no means seemed strongly enough expressive of the importance of the thing itself. Over and over again she tried; but every effort seemed either more objectionable on the one score, or more inadequate on the other. At length Katharine concluded that it would be best to make a business communication to Mr. Kable himself: and, using for its medium the simplest terms, leave the effect to his own sound judgment, and to God. Besides, Mary might be from home, and thus a message remain undelivered; or if delivered, which was the best supposition, it might not be in the plain and urgent tone that seemed so indispensable.

This made the matter exceedingly simple! It was merely to tell the whole business in the fewest words, and they were as follows:—

"Dear Reuben,

("Forgive the omission of the date, for I am so terrified, that I cannot make sure what the day of the month is without going to ask.) We have heard that Martin Beck is contemplating waylaying you, if you should happen to be coming up the country; and as we have to send to Sydney to my uncle, to tell him that before the outrage on you he means to make an attack on us, I have insisted on having the messenger sent on to put you on your guard. You have been so kind and true a friend, that I could do no less.

"I thought it best to write direct to you, lest Mary should

be away from home, and the information reach you too late. Perhaps I take a great liberty in writing to you: if I do, I hope you will consider how impossible it is for me to avoid it under the circumstances. I feel it to be a sacred duty.

"I perceive what a blundering and awkward epistle I have written; but really I am so terrified, that I feel confident you will make every allowance for me. My particular and all-important object, you know, is to beg—to implore—that you will not come up the road without plenty of company; for there are five of them, and they threaten to commit the most horrible outrages upon you. I cannot say any more, for I am ready to drop with agitation. But I have the fullest confidence in you: having once secured you a full knowledge of the state of things.

"Believe me, dear Sir,

"Yours very faithfully,

"KATHARINE BRACTON."

"P.S. Lest you should feel vexed at the young horse you picked out for me being lent to the black fellow, I must just mention that every other speedy enough happens to be off the farm. I have only just learned that you mean to give him his mouth yourself. I am sure it will make him of tenfold value in my estimation."

But before Katharine's letter was ready, another, by a much less erudite writer, had been prepared in the hut. John Thomas—who, with all his uncouthness, generally managed to recollect the important point at the right time—had reflected, when about to set off for the horse, that Mr. Hurley, when he procured his liberation from the gang, and the restoration of his ticket, had demanded a promise from him, to the effect that if he should hear of any serious danger threatening Marianna (or even the family at large) thereafter, he would lose not a minute in making him acquainted with it. At once turning back, he sent one of the men after the horse, and summoned another who possessed the art of writing (though in a hand somewhat like the delineations of the coast line on a map), to his own hut, where, after some squabbling between the possessor of knowledge and the possessor of authority, an epistle was indited sufficiently expressive as to the facts, if it could only be read.

In the course of another half hour "Young Tommy" had been horsed, commissioned, and instructed by each of the authors of the missives as to his duty, and was making rather more speed than he was told to do with the young horse, in the direction of Sydney.

"Me make you go, you young monkey," ejaculated the youth. "What! you go *more* murry make haste? Very well: baal me care: me like it." Half crazy with delight, the young savage now forgot everything behind him, and only thought,

as he dashed along, how far he might venture to push on that day without knocking up his steed, and where there would be the best bit of feed to camp at for the night.

Rachael, also, hastened back to the township, and awaited with a forlorn and throbbing heart the evening of the day; and whatsoever thought could do, or faith in duty enforce, she neglected not, to nerve herself for the hour of sacrifice. On all men's faces,—or on all but the one of a thousand,—she saw mockery of her race expressed too clearly to be mistaken. But it had been for years a growing comfort to her to remark how much the firm rectitude of her father's principles tended to destroy this prejudice in all who knew him. Now this source of comfort was to be transmuted into one of gnawing anguish; for men would only scoff the more at him, at her, at all her nation, by so much as they would become persuaded he had deceived them well. She knew she should see, on a score of faces, every day, the leer of triumph over the hypocrite unmasked, and *he* cold, helpless in his grave. It was hard to bear; but,—and then the smile glowed forth again, and the tear went back, and the sigh was checked, and almost changed to resignation,—but if the beauteous earth, with lovelier realms of the spirit's own, that are enjoyed unseen, had no dark spot of imperfection, how should we ever submit to think of and prepare for the lovelier, holier realm that lies beyond the tomb?

The gloom of evening came on,—deepened, darkened into night: still the expected knock was watched for in vain. Rain set in, and grew heavier and heavier. Her two servants went to rest, and left her alone in the little parlour. The candle burnt far down; the silence became the silence of midnight: still no signal. At length the first cock crew. Then the thought, the hope, struck her that she might have been made merely the plaything of an impostor, and that the wild tale had only been feigned to extort a boon. Full of this hope, thankful, and relieved of half her anguish, the maiden retired to her couch.

That morning, when Rachael sent the miserable renegade back into the bush, he sauntered leisurely along, and when he had satisfied his hunger, sat down to smoke his pipe. He was three miles down the road from the township, quite secure at that early hour from the observation of any one likely to question and molest him. He had no suspicion that the gang would pursue him: he supposed they would not discover his absence till morning, and then not surmise why or whither he had withdrawn. But the day would be a longish one, and he must sleep away as much of it as he could: he would have a smoke, and he should need a drink after his pipe; so he would just have his smoke by the river side, and then go over

the range into the first hollow beyond, and find a nice shady tree, and get the day over in the best way he could.

The road along the river side was a sandy one; a point of the range ran close down to the brink of the channel just ahead of where he sat, obstructing the view almost immediately. His schemes perfected in success, his pipe alight, his hat off, leaning on his elbow, pitching stones into the pool below, he felt that at last "*it would do: a little nob-work wasn't such a bad help, after all.*" Hark!—a quick indistinct, grinding tramp of many feet in the sand! Nearer—plainer! Sight as well as sound! The black in front, on his strong bony horse, and his glaring eye making him its focus in an instant: his four mates riding double behind! An instant's check of the horse, a fierce dash in of the spurs, and that stern ebon face was right over him.

"Oh, he's done it," said the black, turning to the rest of the party, without deigning even to look into his face. "Here's a handkerchief full of grub: a white handkerchief; a regular lady's handkerchief: and, see! look in your hat there, Rooney: he's got it half full of tobacco!"

They didn't talk much: they asked him no questions, and they uttered no imprecations: they spoke in an ordinary tone, but rather a reserved way, among themselves; it was chiefly about the horses being "rather blown" with the double load and the sand, and the speed, and the heat. But in a minute or so, Morgan Brown got down and took the tether rope (there was but *the one* brought) off his horse's neck, and laid his hand on the head of Marcus, and said, "Come, get up on Martin's horse." It was said almost coaxingly: but there was a dreadful significancy about it. In vain the captured traitor protested, pleaded, struggled, lied, offered to tell the truth—to tell all——

"Tell what, man?" cried the black. "Who's asking you to tell anything? I'm no scholar, but I can make out that R M that's marked in the corner of that handkerchief; and I know there's none of that sort of tobacco within five miles of here but what's in the Jew's store. Jump up, and don't make a fool of yourself."

They lashed his feet together beneath the horse's belly, and wound the tether-rope over and over his thighs and round his waist, and round by the horse's withers and back, and round and over and over again: they lit a piece of rag from his pipe to light their own, and Beck gave him the snow-white handkerchief with his "grub" in to carry in one hand, and the bridle in the other; and they gave him back his own hat, and had a drink a-piece. Then Beck flung the handful of tobacco far away into the water-hole, and the two stockmen and their mates pushed off back down the road. Beck's horse followed

rock, spreading out on one side its boughs upon the grass of the top, and stretching forth on the other a long, massive, horizontal limb. But, though the end of the halter was even tossed over the beam, no man seemed to like to put his hand to it.

Enraged at their indecision, the black sprang at the barrel of the tree, worked himself up it, and crawled along the boughs on to the grassy ground above. "Up with the end of that rope," he cried; and, turning round, was out of sight in an instant. Soon afterwards, they heard something heavily dashed down upon the top. Half a minute to coil the rope's end round a huge log; a look whether all was clear below; a shove with the foot,—and the log falls to the ground, and the spy is spinning round, and plunging horribly about in the air.

"Be alive, my lads!" exclaimed the black, returning by a descent beside the gunyah; "load on all the horses can carry. We must push off into mistiful Bud-tha-wong;* we're not safe an hour longer here. If he hasn't told all *now*, it's because he's told it some other time. These have been his journeys by himself, 'to see one of his shipmates that was shepherding near the township.'"

Once or twice, as they led the outworn and spiritless animals, now more overloaded than before, towards the outlet from the Basin of Rocks, one and another of the party—Beck alone excepted—turned in the curiosity of horror, and, perhaps, with some emotions of sympathetic anticipation, and looked back at the dismal object. Beck seemed impatient at this: his eye caught every such movement on the very instant. "Come, come!" he cried, "staring at the ghost of the past wont help the future. The police will do the rest for him when they get here: it'll amuse 'em a bit whilst we get ahead."

By this time the rain, that at first had only swept sparingly along on fitful gusts of the rising wind, was coming, thick and fast, on heavier squalls, but still fitfully. The twilight was almost gone, and the bush all round looked desolate and cold, and dim and awful. Great pools spread all over the flats, and the water rushed in little torrents down the gutters of the ranges. They went slipping and plashing along; their clothes soaked through to the skin; their eyes blinded by the rain, that drained through their hats: weary, hungry, morose. The horses, even, could scarcely keep their feet: and so the night closed in.

Vainly, indeed, might Rachael sit hour and hour, and await the signal of the miserable renegade: his journeys were at an end!

But there was another who watched late, on that wet, windy

* This is a half English, half aboriginal way in which the blacks speak of the mountain; meaning merely, "misty Budawong," from the astonishing intensity of the fog that sometimes prevails in its recesses.

night. Till long, long after midnight, Katharine sat and listened to the storm. She felt that to try to sleep would be but a vain endeavour. Mrs. Bracton retired; her cousin retired: the apprehensions and excitement of all had given way to weariness, or were allayed by hope. But the more Katharine dwelt upon the subject, the more her heart sank within her. And yet it was not her own share of the jeopardy: not a thought of that remained in her mind. Her dread—her anxiety, was all for that brave heart which, it was now evident had all along been so loving and so thoughtful of her. She asked herself whether it really *could* be that he loved her, and with that love whose nature it is not to divide itself? She saw that it *could*—it *must* be: for in the increasing light of the broad truth every lesser point became clear and consistent. Then she went into her chamber, and brought that hoarded letter of Mary's, and stirring the fire, sat down and drew up the lamp and read it: pondering over it till she was lost in joy, and thankfulness, and smiles. But then again recurred the sudden harrowing thought, "Possibly the *first* news may reach him and not the *last;* and what more likely than that *now* he may seize the opportunity to prove his sincerity by hastening to assist my uncle: come on here, and meet in mortal struggle with that bold, bad man."

Katharine's religion was not an idea—an hypothesis, merely: it was a reality—a power. It guided her amidst the visible: it brought her help and comfort from the invisible;—she long had known it was so, and knew it better every day.

"Thou Power Supreme!" she ejaculated, as she meekly knelt and bowed her head, in the full consciousness of human impotence and Divine omnipotence; "in every sorrow Thou hast heard my cry: in every need Thou hast given me help, and hope, and life. Richer joys become my lot each added year of life, till shame ofttimes possesses me to think that I should ever doubt Thy love. Surely I *will not* distrust Thee now, though Thou hast appointed me sorrows as well as joys. Oh, bethink Thee of that noble heart! Let his simple rectitude, his charities, be as memorials before Thee. Protect him! oh, protect him, Merciful Father! from the evil and violent man.

> 'Greater art Thou by his side,
> Than armies of demons against him allied.'"

There was but too much reason for apprehending, from the natural course of events, this dreaded rencontre. Beck looked on his countryman as the immediate cause of his irreparable downfall and desperate fortunes; and he was now hastening to hide himself and his followers in the tangled and gloomy mazes of Budawong mountain. That mountain and Brisbane Water lie about equidistant, in opposite directions, from

Lupton's inn, where Reuben Kable always stayed one night in his up-country journeys. It would take about as long for the native lad, well-horsed as he was, to get to Brisbane Water, and thence start Reuben on his journey, as it would for Beck and his comrades, travelling heavily as they did, to reach the mountain. And thus the parties would encounter somewhere about the half-way house.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

The Messengers to Broken Bay—"The Daisy" broken-hearted—Arrival of the Messengers—Effect of the tidings on Reuben and Mary Kable—Reuben's resolve and departure.

Hour after hour passed, and still the rain poured down in perfect sheets. Morning came; but no abatement: one of the heavy falls of rain to which the colony is subject, had set in. The cattle all disappeared from low and open tracts, and sought shelter on elevated forest ground. Wherever there was a hollow, *there* brawled a torrent: the roads were cut up, the plains swamped, and the greater watercourses filling fast.

The first messenger who had been despatched—Turpin Charles—still continued working his way steadily but slowly forward. No weather could have been better adapted to expedite his journey: there was scarcely a traveller upon the roads.

Young Tommy proceeded still more rapidly; bidding fair to overtake his predecessor before they arrived at their journey's end. Mr. Hurley, to whom he was to deliver John Thomas's missive, was not at home; nor could his servant tell when he would return: it was not improbable that he might be away several days. Tommy knew Mr. Hurley very well; and he had made sure of some "white money"—the blacks of the interior disdain copper: but now he had no further temptation to linger till he reached Sydney.

Mr. Bracton had not accomplished his project so readily as he expected: the deeds of a farm of twelve hundred and eighty acres were demurred to as a very inadequate guarantee for the payment of nearly as many pounds; and when Tommy arrived with Marianna's letter, no compromise had been effected. The headstrong young savage had jaded his horse so much, young and fresh as it was at starting, that its owner thought proper to send it to a livery stable. As Tommy knew he must not delay an hour unnecessarily, and that the boats were uncertain conveyances for urgent occasions, he was off betimes next morning, along the coast; crossing Sydney harbour at the offset, and the waters of Broken Bay later

in the day. On his own part, Mr. Bracton, giving his attorney such final instructions as the case allowed of, hurried to the protection of his family.

To them, but to Mrs. Bracton in particular, every hour of his absence now seemed a year. Rachael wrote to them that the wretched man whose end has been traced, had not made his appearance; and that she concluded he had been making a last attack upon her credulity and good nature, by a feigned tale: he probably thinking, from her exhortations to him, that his sinecure had drawn to its end. Marianna's fears were thus partly allayed: for she had found Rachael generally right in her opinions; and the very weather itself seemed a protection. But Katharine, who had the safety of some one dearer than herself at stake, scrutinized Rachael's supposition with much more jealousy: to her it seemed possible, but not probable. The man, as Rachael had at first informed them, had come in, prepared to give himself up: had, it seemed, a sound prospect to go upon; and had been induced only at Rachael's urgent request, to defer his determination. Did this look like stratagem to obtain a meal and a little tobacco? There was a darkness and mystery about the whole affair that rather increased than diminished her first dismay. The rain beat in hurricanes against the windows behind; in front, the creek had overflowed its banks: even their site was not to be made out by the eye. The whole flat, almost across to the opposite mountain, was one bleak, wild, watery waste.

Somewhere about the time when young Tommy got into Sydney, Reuben Kable was steering the sloop through the Heads out into the main, homeward bound. But soon after he got out to sea, the wind seemed not to know what point of the compass to come from; though still strong and blustering, with a heavy swell on: it then set in so dark all night as to render it indispensable to give the land a wide berth; and it was not till next evening, some time after sunset, that he brought up alongside his own wharf.

The fire was blazing merrily, and the kettle humming its old, droll, patient song; and the tea-things were all laid out, and Margaret sitting at her usual occupation of knitting, as he entered, and with some trouble drew off his drenched pilot-coat. But Mary was not there. Of late, it had been often so. Formerly, it had never been; and it grieved him to the heart; for he knew the reason. But he said, for form's sake—and yet almost sternly, as if he thought the old woman had neglected a main duty—

"Where's Mary, Margaret?"

"Oh, honie!" she answered. "I can't keep her. That poor bairn'll pine herself to death."

Reuben made no further remark for a minute or so, for his heart-strings were twitching in all directions.

"Something must be done with her, honie!" proceeded the old woman. "She deesn't eat as much as would feed a bird. I wish she had never seen Mr. Bracton."

"Nonsense! He'll come to light in course of time."

"Then you've not heard anything this trip, again?"

"No."

"She's been waiting and waiting, and hoping and hoping, ever since you've been away."

"Where is she?"

"In her own room, bairn; or else in yours."

Reuben went out, and after the lapse of some minutes returned with the poor truant. But oh! how wan, and spiritless, and shy! It was much now that he could have one arm round his waist, by holding it there; the other held her handkerchief, and her head hung at his side, almost like one who was ashamed. The old woman looked not toward them: but she sighed bitterly, and moved herself restlessly, and put down her knitting, and in a bewildered way attempted to mend the fire.

"I've brought you," said Reuben, as he seated Mary by the tea-board, and placed his own chair beside her, and leaned over her shoulder and fell into the tone of a parent who tries to divert the attention of a suffering child—"I've brought you the silk, and the sarcenet, the cambric, and the calico; and, let me see, what else? Sugar, currants, the spices. Oh, and because you are the little queen of housekeepers, a new set of milk dishes—earthenware ones—that you may have to have 'a skrimmage' with the old dairyman only every other morning, instead of six times a week, and then give him one in. (You always let him off, I observe, on Sundays): *and* —— as to going through the bother of all this marketting, or shopping, or whatever else you may call it, I think I should have been frozen to death, it was so cold last night, if it hadn't been for thinking of the amends you are going to make me."

The Daisy turned, smiling, at the hint—"There!" she said. "Paid on demand!—and, there—and, there! Everybody wont pay you three times what you ask."

"Ah!" said Reuben, "nor will everybody give you back what you pay, as I do."

"Come, my lass," said Margaret, cheerful once more, "your brother must be hungry. Make the tea."

"*Are* you hungry?" inquired the Daisy, anxiously, as she did so.

"Well, I've had nothing since about six o'clock this morning. We made sure of getting in last night, and only brought enough out of Sydney for a couple of meals."

"Oh, that sea—that sea!" exclaimed Mary, mournfully: and again there was a cloud passing over her sun.

The tea-time passed, and the evening sped on; and the old

woman—now excessively feeble, and sinking in that rapid and almost sudden way that marks the termination of a sound old age in this climate—retired for the night, and left her foster children by themselves. Mary listened with deep attention as Reuben exhorted her to patience and hope; for whenever he paused, he kissed her, and drew her to his side like some young dove which has failed and foundered in its first flight, and is tenderly taken up and soothed by a kindly forester.

Suddenly a noise from the kitchen, unusual at that time of night, aroused their attention; and Reuben, listening, clearly distinguished a voice he knew very well—that of the strange character we last saw in confidential conversation with Oshee Simons over a half-pint of grog at Mr. Peter Burnes.' The considerate man had really got here before the courier who started after him.

Reuben rose and opened the parlour door just in time to meet old Jemmy, ushering the unexpected messenger from the kitchen. An instant's hope fluttered in Mary's heart that Willoughby had arrived: but in another instant it fled, to join the hundred false hopes that had arisen and been dispelled before.

"You're the same gentleman, I judge," said Turpin Charles, now feeling himself at the truly critical point of his mission, "what was at our farm last year?"

"Well?" said the Australian.

"I judged you was: but you used to wear a shooting-coat then, instead of that there blue jacket. Well, here's a letter as I was to bring down from the ladies: which on 'em wrote it I can't say; but I'm rayther inclined to think its Katharine, because it's writ so reg'lar. Miss Marianna's handwriting's more of a scribble, you know, because she's so quick and dextrous."

"You're an original, Charles," said Reuben, taking the letter. "Oh, it's to my sister! What's the matter? Miss Katharine Bracton's not ill?"

"Well, it's hard to say: we can't make out *what* it is: but the old gentleman's gone off to somewhere, as if—if—if somebody, as I wont mention afore the lady, had kicked him endwise. We can't none on us make it out. There. But you'll see. Katharine?—oh, for that matter *she's* well enough. I've been quite taking notice on her all this week. She's got one of them new gowns of her's on; and when she sports one of them, you know, for the first two or three days, she looks so nice and spruce that its quite fortifying to see her."

"Well, come, you're very wet, I see," said Reuben, laughing; "follow me to the huts, and I'll tell some of 'em to take care of you."

Reuben, proceeding to perform his promise, left Mary to peruse her friend's letter. Its general contents and spirit the

reader is already acquainted with. Nor need we avouch the surprise and pain which the tidings occasioned Mary Kable. At his return, Reuben found her full of dismay, and eager to do she knew not what.

"Did *you* know anything about this loan?" she inquired of her brother, at length.

"Not a word. People are not to be expected to tell their family affairs to every one they have a temporary connexion with."

"Oh, that I know," rejoined Mary; "only you often *do* know things you don't tell me. My dear Katharine! How good of her to send and let us know. A thousand pounds! What a shocking thing Charles Bracton should have been so foolish! How very unlike Willoughby! isn't it, brother?"

"It really seems as if the troubles of this family would never end!" ejaculated Reuben, rather to himself than replying to his sister.

Mary remained silent; for she feared he was on the brink of expressing his conviction that assistance was all thrown away upon them. She felt anxious to divert his thoughts for a time, lest they should take that form: but everything she could think of seemed to have a tendency to do the very mischief she dreaded. At length she spoke impulsively, forgetting herself:—

"I'm glad it's happened."

"You're glad it's happened?"

"Yes, I am."

"Why?"

"Oh, I know." Mary meant that Katharine, by insisting that Reuben should be immediately made acquainted with the state of affairs, was virtually acknowledging her belief of his affection, and throwing herself upon it.

The Australian continued to stare at his sister for half a minute, and was then in the act of turning his eyes elsewhere, with somewhat of angry disdain at what seemed so strange and unbecoming a levity, when she threw herself on her knees at his side.

"Reuben, don't look at me in that way. I do assure you Katharine loves you,—almost adores you:—thinks there is not such another being in existence. I know it. I always knew it, though she would not own it; for you frightened her. You go about in that reserved, independent way of yours, as if you scorned all sympathy and help."

"If I do, I am not aware of it; and I am sure, if it is so, I am exceedingly sorry."

"But you do: there is no doubt of it. Willoughby says when you go aboard the boat, and he's running her, you take all the command out of his hands directly. He laughed at it, you know: he wasn't angry. But we were talking about your

way, and he said (don't be angry; I can't help laughing) he said that one night, when they were got in rather too close to Barrenjuegh, and you were coming home with them, and a heavy squall came on suddenly from the eastward, you just went and pushed him on one side, and took the helm yourself, the same as if he'd been an apprentice, and began shouting to the hands, and to him just the same as to the rest."

"My dear Polly, it was when Willoughby first began to run the boat. He didn't know the coast like I do. I could see he was looking and pondering what the wind meant; and I knew of old what it meant as soon as I saw the ripple coming. We should have been under water in a couple of minutes more, if I hadn't."

"But you always do so."

"No, no; I don't. No man can think more highly of another, as a man and as a seaman, than I do of Willoughby."

"And, brother, you'll not let his family be put about now he's away, for a little money; will you?"

"No, no; by no means."

"You know he would think it very unkind of me. I've got enough lying in the bank without selling any cattle—hav'n't I?—to do it myself."

"There's no need of your troubling yourself about it, my darling: I'll attend to it the first thing to-morrow. I'll go to Sydney: it is there, of course, that Mr. Bracton is; and it shall be settled at once. But tell me, without any more of this nonsense and joking, why Katharine should have, as you suppose, any serious affection for me? Facts, you know; not opinions."

"First, brother,—*Do you love her?*"

The Australian demurred a few moments. But at last he said, "*I do;*" adding, somewhat hurriedly and impatiently, "Always did, from when I saw her first." A smile gathered on the face of Mary, as she still knelt at his side.

"We have your secret," she said, "whether you ever get Katharine's or not. And that is as it ought to be. But——"

Suddenly the dogs were heard in full and fierce clamour at a little distance; then some one shouting to the residents of the farm to come and call them off. But such occurrences were frequent, and the conversation was again proceeding, when there was a knock at the kitchen door, which once more summoned the cook; who again, after a minute's investigation, conducted the individual who had arrived, to the room where Reuben and Mary were sitting.

The young black who entered neither wiped his shoes nor took off his hat; for he had neither one nor the other to give him so much trouble: but, without at all hurrying to deliver the letter, he lifted up one foot on to the other knee, and after examining it for an instant, said, very composedly, "Cuss

that bush about here! How I have been cut my toe: all scrub; not open bush like Morrumbidgee."

"What!" exclaimed his countryman. "Young Tommy, I believe, belonging to Diandullah—belonging to Rocky Springs?"

"Yes; you my countryman," replied Tommy, who having been from his earliest days amongst the white people, spoke a very tolerable imitation of the English language. "I been bring you letter from young Missis," he continued; a roguish grin passing over his black features, shining and glittering with the wet that still kept streaming down from the ends of his tangled hair, that hung down like a thrum mop. After considerable fumbling, he contrived to untwist a horribly dirty rag from round his belt on the left hip, and unfolding it, produced a piece of paper, which one good shake would have shattered into a dozen pieces.

Reuben spread out the wet and tattered relic upon the table; but before he attempted to decipher it, he asked—

"Where you come from to-day, Tommy?"

"Tydney," said Tommy; "cobbon me make haste. That Miss Gadarine been say so."

"Reuben," said Mary—thinking that the rest might as well be obtained from her friend's letter, as from the messenger in the presence of old Jemmy, who could not well be told not to wait for the black—"Let Tommy go and get some bullock (beef) and wikki (bread), and pot-o'-tea, whilst you read the letter. Jemmy, let him stop in the kitchen to-night; he's dreadfully wet. I can't think how he came to get here: none of our blacks would travel at this time of night."

"Never me jerran (afraid)," said Tommy. "Most like white man, me. Reuben, you got 'nother shirt? Murry wet, this."

Tommy's travelling dress consisted of a red woollen shirt, a pair of duck trousers, and a belt; and each was thoroughly saturated with wet.

"Go and get him a new red shirt out of the store, Polly," said Reuben.

"Trousers murry wet, too, Misser Kable," pleaded Tommy, lifting himself well above the table, that the light might attest his veracity.

"Give him a new pair."

"Come, Tommy," said Mary, taking the candle.

"Yes, yes; I come direcally. Reuben; (countryman you belonging to me.) Never me have a smoke all day, only little bit," he said, showing his empty pipe. And whilst Reuben was searching his pockets for some negrohead, he added, "Misser Bracton been take away my horse in Tydney. Miss Gadarine been say I must have him; and Misser Bracton been take him away."

"You couldn't have come any further than Sydney with the horse, if you'd had it, Tommy."

Tommy seemed to recollect, for the first time, that it was so. He had had to cross the harbour at Sydney, and again to cross Broken Bay at Pitt Water (a distance of several miles); in both instances begging a passage, which, by custom, is always given freely to the aborigines, who are supposed to have no money. But Tommy, in his resentment of the injurious treatment of Mr. Bracton, had quite failed to recollect that to be dispossessed of the horse was, after all, no actual disadvantage. Mr. Bracton, who had now begun to manage all such little affairs with plenty of foresight and tact, had also purposely abstained from giving him much money, from a shrewd conjecture what would be the consequence. Whether he gave him any, or how Tommy spent it during the previous evening, if he did; or whether he gave him any tobacco, as the young gentleman has represented that he did not, we do not care to say.

And now Reuben is alone, bending, with eager eyes, over the torn and obliterated scroll. In the thought that it is *Katharine's*, and *to him*, he almost loses sight of the fact that he cannot decipher it. Again and again his strong and piercing eye is carried rapidly along the clear and intelligible parts, in an effort to infer or imagine the deficiencies. No! Only here and there words meet him such as he is not used to from woman—saving Mary only. Words breathing care—anxious, trembling care—*for him*. And those words are written by *Katharine*. The words bring back the very tones of her voice; he feels as if she were so near that he could turn and speak to her:—an image dim, but angel-like sweeps through the chambers of his mind.

But again he essays to construct the fragments of thought into a congruous whole. Still in vain. He turns the paper: at all events he can gaze upon the name. But what are these last words? they are legible enough—"*I shall value the horse ten times as much for the touch of your hand.*" "*Ten times!*" —there must be meaning in that, when written by Katharine: Katharine is no giddy hyperbolist. "Value the horse ten times as much if I break him in. Well, now, that'll do: that's something like coming to the point. Noble, beautiful Katharine! Upon my honour, I must have been a tremendous fool, or something worse."

"It's raining, Reuben, as if heaven and earth would come together," said Mary, who now entered, shivering with the damp and chill.

"Here, come and read this letter. Let's hear what you make out from it."

"Read it? why, nobody can read it. What a pity! What can Katharine have written to *you* for? Of course, it's something about this loan: perhaps they have thought of asking you to assist them over this difficulty."

"Not a syllable of this sort—the main strain seems to be caution to me that that black, Beck, that's in the bush somewhere about the Morrumbidgee and the Snowy Mountains, means to take vengeance, *if he can*, for my bundling him off from the Rocky Springs."

The intimation of such a danger threatening her brother, though he sneered at it, instantly drew Mary's closest scrutiny to the letter.

"Oh! there's more; much more than that," at length said Mary; who, used to Katharine's characters and turns of phrase, could both read and understand, and connect the broken sentences in a very different way from her brother. "Here's something about danger to themselves from that man."

"To themselves? From Beck?"

"Yes—and she'll brave it fearlessly for herself: only she is terrified lest he should succeed in some horrible outrage he contemplates upon you."

The next instant Reuben was in the kitchen.

"Tommy, who gave you this letter? But here: come into the parlour: never mind your supper for a couple of minutes: nobody'll run away with it."

"Brother," exclaimed Mary, as he re-entered with the black, and closed the door—a thing Reuben was rarely very precise about—

"Did you see the last lines?"

"Yes."

"Do you believe now?"

"Yes. Tommy, who gave you that letter!"

"Overseer—Welshman."

"What did he say?"

"Only say, *murry, make haste.*"

"What for murry, make haste?"

"Oh, that Miss Gadarine want you direcally."

"Wants me?"

"Yes, yes; *that want you.*" And Tommy first nodded to Reuben in a very serious and significant manner; and then he looked at Mary and nodded in a very waggish and significant manner, just meaning neither more nor less than—"Well, it's no harm: you know you are all alike, you can't do without us."

"Tommy," said Mary, too well accustomed to the monkey-like tricks of her aboriginal fellow-country-folks to be at all annoyed, "Reuben wants to know what you're sent off here to him in such a hurry for."

"D—n it," said Tommy, "I think I been speak plain enough. Miss Gadarine murry frightened, 'cause that old overseer Misser Beck been coming directly along-a-bushranger; and that want, Misser Reuben, my countryman, to come. Woman can't fight."

The Australian started up without uttering a syllable, and stood looking uneasily round, like one who in hottest haste, knows not where to seek what he wants, or wants something but knows not what it is, till his eyes fell upon a corner of the room where was a little recess; then stepping over the chair and lifting the black by the shoulders out of the way, he brought out that long barrelled gun that Mary had heard so vaunted of from their childhood upward; and his face had become, as it always became, when he was violently enraged, pale and still as the face of the dead.

"Stop!" he exclaimed, as she began to speak. "Not a word, as you love me. Tommy, are there any boats lying on this side of the water?"

"Yes; I been see one there before I come: then 'nother what I come in along-a-gentleman: 'nother coming across."

"Will you go with me—after you've had your supper?"

"Baal—Reuben—that too much rain—me murry tired."

"Stay, then .Polly (don't look so frightened, silly girl) ,you must tell the old man (the old man-o'-war's man), to run the boat this trip. He knows where to load——"

"What are you going to do, brother?"

"I'm going to take Beck, or else shoot him. As sure as he wears a head, if I can once get on his track, I'll bring him in either alive or dead—one of the two. You know I never was a bushranger-hunter, Mary. But now I'll do my whole share at once—ay, and without leaving off till I have done it."

Hints about rashness; warnings against danger; reminding of the broad, wild, tossing billow that lay betwixt the present hour and the morning's dawn, availed nothing. The only change Mary could effect was, during her brother's temporary absence in his own chamber, to prevail upon Tommy, by an unsparing donation of tobacco, and a new pipe, and a glass of rum, to accompany him. Reuben's absence was but for some ten minutes; it was well she seized the opportunity as deftly as she did. Rain, tempest, and murkiest gloom met them as they opened the door to go forth.

"You never can go!" exclaimed Mary.

"Didn't you ask me a while ago if I believed Katharine loved me? Didn't I say I did? Come, Tommy."

Three paces from the cottage, and they were lost in the darkness.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

Reuben's Journey—Budawong—More Plunder—Beck's loss and threat—The Old Shepherd—Alarm of the family—Reuben and Mr. Bracton—Reuben's arrival at the Rocky Springs—His Reception.

THE course of Reuben and his companion was for some miles through the bush: then succeeded a rough and tedious pull across the main waters of Broken Bay for several miles more; then another track of bush: and finally, the passage across the harbour of Port Jackson into the city of Sydney.

There are times when all hesitation and (to a certain extent) even caution itself must be thrown aside: when one specific course must be followed out by the best means that present themselves, and no other course so much as thought of: when promptitude is the true prudence. Such an occasion the Australian felt this to be; and in pursuing his course forward, he spared neither himself nor his barbarian countryman. On he went through thicket and morass; up the smooth hill-sides and the rocky jump-ups; conquering his way from wave and wind; reckless of the darkness, heedless of the ceaseless pelting of the rain, and its dismal splash hour after hour amongst the leaves; and regardless of the roar of the torrents.

But Tommy, already jaded with his more voluntary exertions, and wanting his countryman's impulse, could scarcely be induced to keep up till they reached Sydney. As the ferry-boat glided across the harbour, the grey dawn brightened into a sunrise of crimson and gold: and by the time they had made their way into the central streets of the town, the more active inhabitants, whose duties lay out of doors, were wending to their avocations: the carmen were flocking to the wharfs; and the sailors' quaint catches, as they stowed or got out their cargoes, met the ear from all quarters of the harbour.

It was evidently impossible to get Tommy any further without "a spell." Reuben, therefore, contented himself with ascertaining that the lad could get his horse again when ready to proceed; and, leaving him means of providing for his wants in the interim, he pursued his journey alone; half an hour having sufficed to refresh and mount himself for the road.

It was still early morning, fresh and cool, and the weather had thoroughly taken up. For many miles of the first stages, the roads were sound and good, and the Australian's pace was rapid. Liverpool was speedily reached—the Cow-pasture

River crossed—huge Razorback Mountain climbed and descended—Stonequarry passed—and those great far-stretching level avenues that axe and fire have carried through the dense and lonely wildernesses of Bargo, onward to the neat roadside inn, were traversed right up to its well-known door. Here Reuben got a hurried snack, a light of the pipe, and a fresh horse: for only sixty miles were yet travelled.

It was here that Beck was to waylay and avenge himself upon Reuben. The true man, however, had outridden the base. Their motives were diametrically opposite, and their movements correspondently different.

When the heavy weather set in, Beck and his gang found it impossible to urge forward their heavily-laden horses, already tired with a hard day's work: but before the darkness had closed in, and the horses manifested symptoms of knocking up, they had made good some five or six miles. At that point a dense forest presented itself, at once affording the gang ample concealment and materials for quickly constructing a bark gunyah. They had their tomahawks, and whilst some cut and erected the sapling frame, and kindled the fire against a hollow log, Beck's able arm supplied the roofing; and in half-an-hour a tent-hut, large enough to contain them all, stood fronting within a few feet the fast-growing blaze. A long dry barrel of timber—an old windfall—lay just in front. The fire, placed against this, soon made its way through the shell, and burned cheerily and well sheltered from the rain. With such contentment as such men can feel, the outlaws once more cowered beneath a shelter from the elements; and, having arranged their stores, proceeded to dry their garments and blankets.

Nor was it till after the lapse of several days, that the rain permitted them to recommence their journey. Reuben Kable was already at Lupton's Inn, when the bushrangers concluded that the fine weather had set in steadily enough for them to venture to pursue their way to the retreat they now contemplated occupying, in the gloomy and savage recesses of Budawong.

This is a mountain distant from the sea something more than twenty miles, as the crow flies. It is very lofty, and the ocean, seen from several of the more elevated parts, seems to flow almost at its base. Broken into a hundred bewildering ravines and pinnacles, and swathed to the very summit with the closest and most magnificent timber, it presents a nest of fastnesses where an army might be placed in ambuscade. It is apparently of volcanic origin, and the richest loam alternates throughout its surface with broken fragments and courses of rock. Numberless streams trickle or rush—as they may be smaller or larger, less or more fed by the weather—down its gullies and ravines, seeking the great reservoirs below. Many

of its depths, and indeed many of its hill-sides, are never reached by sunshine; at the depth of its greater abysms the longest summer day consists of but a few of the mid hours; and darksome solitude and weariest silence reign, chequered only by some sudden gush of richest music from the wild bird sunning himself on the highest branches of the trees at noon, or the dolorous howl of the warregal prowling up and down the creeks at dead of night. Here the outlaws concluded that, with a little precaution, they might conceal themselves for some time undisturbed. Whatever reprisals Beck might wish to make on his white countrymen, he knew that his first business was to establish himself in his first quarters: revenge must be deferred, at all events, till common security was attained.

Their course to Budawong lay round the back, or coast side of Mr. Bracton's stations. Their first day's journey brought them parallel to the out-stations, at a couple of miles distant, about evening. Here, after the horses were released, and as they sat smoking round their fire in a solitary gulley, a new desire suggested itself to Beck, as a little mob of Mr. Bracton's horses showed themselves on one of the ridges within sight.

"Soldier," he said, "you could ride well enough without a saddle till we can hear of one for you, and Rooney could learn."

"Better than padding the hoof, lads," cried Morgan eagerly, comprehending Martin's meaning by the direction he was looking in.

"There's an old station where the sheep were before the shepherd found out the big waterhole," proceeded Beck. "There's never been any sheep there this long time, and one of the ends of the yard is broken down: we could easily run that mob of horses into the yard, and catch a couple. What do you say?"

All hands immediately pronounced it "the only thing to be done." Just enough light remained to accomplish it; and, leaving Warraghi to take care of the stores, the rest of them immediately began to direct the course of the little mob of seven or eight horses towards the old station. On arriving within sight of the hut, however, an unforeseen obstacle presented itself: smoke was arising from the chimney; the ruinous state of the station had disappeared, and the tinkling of a sheep-bell from the yard proclaimed that the ground was again occupied and a flock folded within the fence. For an instant it seemed that the project was a futile one; but the gang were now too reckless to yield to anything less than inevitable disappointment; and, after a consultation, they determined to go to the hut, and, making their purpose plainly known, compel the shepherd to turn the flock out. The shepherd proved to be already gone off to one of the neighbouring stations; but the

hut-keeper was one of the old hands belonging to the farm, and consequently a man whom Beck knew well. He was, moreover, one of the lowest characters; capable of taking whichsoever side suited him for the time; and soon gave the gang to understand that they might do as they pleased for anything he cared: he would offer no impediment. The sheep were, therefore, quickly out, the gateway widened into a large breach, and the horses headed in.

The shepherd had gone off for several hours; the station was far out of every line of common traffic; and no disturbance was to be expected for the rest of the evening. When the horses were secured with a couple of halters made out of a tether-rope, a general gathering into the hut to light the pipes followed. And now, as his mates smoked, Beck's curiosity was excited to learn how things went on at the farm; and to ascertain whether Reuben Kable was still expected to visit the Rocky Springs, and what, in common opinion, was the real object of his visit. Finally, he wished to make sure exactly what the wretched man, whose fate has been described, had said at the township, and what steps consequent thereon had been taken by the police.

"Well, Liar," said Beck to the hutkeeper—whom he was merely addressing by his common appellation, "what sort of an overseer does the Welshman make?"

"Oh, well enough," responded the individual questioned.

"You don't mean to say he gives you better weight in rations than I did?"

"No, you used to give the best weight, Martin."

"Well, does he work you any easier?"

"No:—has the yards cleaned out every day."

"Did I use to take you to court, then?—or how is it he's such a chop?"

"Oh, he's not much of a chop, I must say: ever so many about the farm wishes you was back again."

"Ha! but this swell overseer's coming to see you again; isn't he?"

"Who's that? What, Mr. Kable? Oh, very like: I think he is: I heard say so. Some of 'em says he's only coming a courting; and others says he's going to buy the farm."

"Which same," added Beck, half ejaculatory, "is one and the same thing."

"So I should say," remarked Brown; "and then we 'll have a nice neighbour."

"All's not lost that's in danger," said the black, at the same instant unconsciously putting his hand to the pocket in which he always carried the tin-case, in which bushmen are in the habit of securing their money and any papers of value. But no sooner had he done so than he sprang hastily up from where he was sitting, and searched more and yet more carefully, with

increasing perplexity and dismay marked on his countenance and features.

"Lost anything, Martin?" asked Brown.

"My box! Why, man, you don't know what you're laughing about. If I can't get a chance of getting my money out of the bank *now*, I could if ever I was in custody: and that box contains all I've got to prove my title to it."

"Oh," said the stockman, "I thought all that was only as good as waste paper now."

In vain was the search pursued, and as vainly did Beck endeavour to recollect any probable occasion when he could have dropped the tin case; which in reality contained his only means of securing legal assistance in the last emergency. All he could be sure of was, that he had never had it in his hand since the day on which they had removed from the Basin of Rocks. When the desertion of their comrade was first discovered, during the night previously to his capture, he had felt for his treasure, fearful that it might be among the stolen articles, and had found it safe; and the most probable thing he could now suppose was, that, having replaced it too carelessly in his pocket, it had jerked out during that journey: but its value to him, in case everything else should fail, was such, that he at once concluded it would be better to track back every step of the ground they had come since; and, if still unsuccessful, even every mile of that day's journey, than give up the hope of repossessing himself of it. But it was now too dark to undertake such a task that night; and he had no alternative but to subdue his impatience till fresh daylight began to break.

In vain his comrades, now become far too serious for jesting in the presence and beneath the spell of his passion, sympathized with him. In vain he himself recollected the uselessness of everything but the efforts involved in the attempt of recovery. Ten times more easily would he have borne to be placed in the most imminent danger of losing his life. Whilst the more the subject took possession of his thoughts, the more definitely did they insist upon putting forward Reuben Kable as the author of the whole mischief, done and impending. With all the fierce profanity of phrase of one who casts off the last check upon his vindictiveness, he went on vowing vengeance upon the head of his adversary; forgetful alike of the rapidly passing hours, and of the probability of the shepherd's return. The hutkeeper began to feel alarmed, lest his mate should make his appearance and detect him in the falsehood he meant to tell about the breach of the fence, and possibly the absence of some of the sheep through their untimely disturbance. At length, however, the suggestion of one of his own comrades, that Warraghi would be alarmed at their absence, and, perhaps, conclude they were captured and abandon his post, aroused Beck to a sense of what was necessary, and he rose to depart.

"True," he said, "*action is everything*. We may be too late to catch the Broken Bay swell on the road up, but we shall not be too late to call at the Rocky Springs as we go by, and leave a little token for him." And taking hold of a pair of sheep shears which lay upon the little back table, he held them at about the height of a person's head, and quaintly shadowed forth his meaning: but that was all. Flinging them down the same instant, he led the way from the hut.

They were now all supplied with horses, and it was agreed that, dividing the loads as equally as possible, the four subordinate members of the gang should proceed on toward Budawong; whilst Beck, detaching himself for the time, should remain at liberty to pursue his search as thoroughly and effectively as he pleased.

Scarcely had the outlaws departed from the hut when another man presented himself at it. This was the old shepherd himself, who had approached some little time before they went, and, listening at the back of the hut, had heard the whole of the latter part of their conversation. Fortunately for the hutkeeper, he had said nothing implicating himself during that brief period, but had merely made remarks urging them to go away. The shepherd was a man of the better stamp, and far advanced in years, but hale as if yet at the meridian of life. Although of the convict class formerly, he had undergone no assimilation to it in essential character. He was one of the order of persons who have singularly little natural bias towards low vices; and would never have been a thief at all, but for what we cannot help calling a necessity of social position. Amidst the solitudes where he had expiated his brief error, his mind had easily and quickly betaken itself to its original and predominating habits, and nothing had since deranged them: and he was now for some years a free man.

Although he knew the robbery of the horses ought to be immediately reported, he still knew it was not desirable to send the hutkeeper in at that late hour about it. He further comprehended that Beck gave up all thought of immediately assailing Mr. Kable: but the vagueness and yet bitterness of the latter part of Beck's final exclamation arrested his consideration. After a few moments he inquired of the hutkeeper,—

"What was it Beck meant to say as he was going away? I heard him snipping the shears, I thought."

"Oh, that you may guess easy enough," said the hutkeeper, laughing vulgarly. "He means he'll go and cut their hair off —the two young ones, you know:—no, I should think only Katharine, and make a little *croppy* of her. What odds? Don't the free people serve out the women that get lagged that way too?"

"Does he, bedad!" exclaimed the old man, as his long silvery

eyebrows knit themselves suddenly into tangles, and he started again to his feet. Within the space of two minutes more, his old monkey-jacket was buttoned around him, and he on his way to the farm. It might be that he had a daughter of his own; also some sweet-faced, hazel-eyed girl, with nut-brown hair, in lands beyond the sea. Often, very often indeed, some such single great fact lies at the fountain head of a countless host of lesser sympathies.

The journey was a long one,—well nigh five-and-twenty miles. The old man got into the farm before day-break, but waited till the ladies arose to put them in possession of what he had heard. Once or twice he doubted whether he was not making too much of it; or perhaps a natural delicacy of sentiment rendered the duty of making the communication an irksome and difficult task.

Katharine's face flushed till the old man cast his eyes down, as he told the rascally menace, and her heart sank within her. Marianna, though not unflurried, listened to it indignantly. Whilst the old man apologized for reporting it, he yet ventured to say "he hoped they wouldn't neglect it. They knew what Beck was when he was *up*. If he should not find his money, he would rage like a wild beast." And so both Mrs. Bracton, and Katharine, and Marianna themselves thought. But so common an occurrence was it for bushrangers to threaten and not perform, that they felt sure that its reportal to the police would secure them nothing beyond a useless, temporary visit. For who could tell what time Beck might select for fulfilling his threat?

A messenger, however, was despatched to the police-station at Ghiagong: for it was considered that, by informing the police where the gang had been at so late a period, and what robbery they had committed, possibly their track might be run down till they were overtaken. But, after all, this seemed to leave the family with a very inadequate sense of security: as to the hands on the farm, amongst them there were so many craven spirits, that they were not to be depended on.

The messenger, as usual, bore with him a billet to Rachael. In that Marianna affected to make light of the threat: but nothing approaching to *proof* that such was her real feeling could have been detected in it. It had the effect of bringing Rachael to the noontide board at the cottage: and now, once more clustering around it, each with a more thoughtful and anxious heart than she revealed, they could only hope, and hope, and hope that the purposes of the Great Teacher with them in these perilous and harrowing visitations would ere long be completed, and a period of repose arrive.

And, at all events, whatsoever the energy of one strong, human spirit could do, was being done. Reuben was pressing on with all that directness of aim and steadiness of will which

so strongly individualized his character. His fresh horse, from Lupton's, a dashing, full-grown animal, of good blood and bone, and well in flesh, left Mittagong behind, almost without turning a hair: and then Bong-Bong; still nearly in as good wind and spirits as when he started. Just when the afternoon sun began sensibly to decline, the young Australian encountered a traveller whom he had anticipated meeting, and feared to have met with before: it was Mr. Bracton, walking his horse; which was almost knocked up with the weight of its rider and the unusual pace it had been put to during the two days. To Mr. Bracton himself the appearance of the native was equally unexpected and welcome; for he was travelling with as heavy a heart as he had ever known. Difficulties and losses, annoyance and suffering, seemed to have been thickening around him from year to year, now for so many years; and even increasing the more he struggled to subdue them; that this present suspense as to the safety of his family seemed quite to extinguish hope. All he had to cheer him was that, as yet, no one whom he had met travelling downward, from the vicinity of Ghiagong, had heard of any fresh outrage by the gang.

"I am sure, sir," said Reuben, after he had controlled himself through a hurried greeting and avowal of his destination, "you will not require from me on this occasion any very exact apology; for I may say at once that I shall ride on and leave you. Candour on my part, and the facts of the case will, I feel quite satisfied, convince your own good sense that I am doing right. I shall not dismount, except to eat and change my horse, till I get to your house. Of course, I must have some more than ordinary motive: it is this—I am informed that that scoundrel Beck is threatening your whole family; and to ensure the safety of any one of them, I would make a pretty rough dash to settle that villain. But I have long had the very highest opinion of Miss Katharine; and when she is in danger, I choose, as a simple matter of taste, just to take the thing up once for all. I mean either to have the rascal safe in one of her Majesty's gaols, or else disable him from committing any more of his devilment: he has been at it quite long enough."

A beam of light fallen upon his path from on high could scarcely have gladdened him on whose ears these words fell, more than did that frank and welcome avowal.

"I shall ride on, sir," Reuben finally said, "and carry before you, by as many hours as I can, your affectionate remembrances to the ladies. Good-evening."

And again the clatter of the hoofs of that tall, dark, bay horse was heard becoming more and more distant on the forward road. Mr. Bracton watched the compact and fast departing mass as long as it was in sight, but the rider's head turned not again. Once more night came on, and once more the native neared one of the larger settlements. Here again

the well-stocked horse-paddock of a friendly fellow countryman furnished him with a steed. And again he dashed on, across those magnificent open pastures, and along by craggy hill-side, and over far-stretching forest, and through creek and river, for the now proximate Morrumbidgee. And as the night sank down, so rose the day; save that twice or thrice through the long, lone hours, the noble and willing animal, ever from earliest yore the comrade of man in valorous enterprizes, obtained a few minutes' pause and breathing time, whilst the pipe was filled and lit, and a few cheering words and touches of caress bestowed.

Severe and cold, and far different from the genial mornings of Broken Bay, appeared the daybreak of the south-western interior, as the well-nigh worn-out steed and his almost slumbering rider traversed the latter part of their course. At length, Ghiagong, and the park-like forest, and the mountain —"Another mile, good Hector, and then rest as long as you will."

The dinner hour passed at the cottage as we have described. An hour afterwards Mrs. Bracton sat by her work-table, silent, musing: lost, perchance, in one of those reveries of affection which a heavenly law prolongs to the old age of virtue. Miss Bracton, within her own apartment, listened, far more patiently and consentingly than she once had done, to the correct and faithful counsels of Rachael. Katharine, afraid any longer to venture to the hill-top, stands for the time half-forgetful of sadder things, inhaling the odour of the jessamine vine, and admiring the glorious spangled beauty it has put on with these two days' sunshine after the rains. And every now and then, as it again and again recurs to her who may some day come—some four or five days hence, perchance—even so soon as that! —riding free, fearless, and firm, round yonder hill point—her glance unconsciously wanders towards it.

"Why, he is there!—now!—Can it be?—Himself!—no other."

And the quick eye of the bushman sees her too; and he waves his hand; and suddenly his horse tosses up his head, hanging so heavily before, and passes into a trot.

Trembling as she had never trembled before, Katharine hurried in, and told in broken exclamations, and as much by gestures as by words, whom she had seen and how near he was. Marianna, Rachael, and Mrs. Bracton, all hastened out to the front verandah. The traveller rode up as their eager hands contended which should open to him the garden-gate It was not without an effort that the Australian came down from his horse; not without an effort, seemingly, that the overdone horse checked himself and stood still with his chest against the fence, then hung his head beyond it. His rider, as he relinquished the bridle, staggered before he could stand; as

that the ladies looked inquiringly and astonished into his face. Reuben laughed; but it was not very merrily.

"It's not *too much*, ladies, but *too little* that's to be blamed. I assure you, I am just as hungry as ever I was in my life; and as tired."

"Where did you meet our messenger, then? The black boy, I mean," said Marianna.

"At Brisbane Water."

"At Brisbane Water?"

"Yes. I rode all last night, and walked or ran, or something of the sort, the night before."

"Mr. Kable!"

"But where is Miss Katharine?"

"She was here just now." Reuben knew that.

"Well?"

"Oh, yes; quite well."

"Beck has not yet made his appearance?"

"No! only we hear of more threats. But come in: we can tell you nothing till you are refreshed."

"Mr. Bracton will be here in a few hours: he sends his remembrances. I'll just take my horse round to the stable, Marianna."

"You'll just *not*, Mr. Kable. The stableman can be called: the stable-door's open. Come, give mamma one arm and Rachael the other, and I'll see that your horse is looked to."

Trembling as she had never trembled before, Katharine had told her tidings;—trembling as she had never trembled before, she passed from room to room; struggled to compose herself; turned away from the mirror, shocked at her own discomposure; listened; heard the horse's hoofs at the very gate of the garden; saw the moment they all made towards it; and then snatched down her bonnet and shawl, and disappeared.

A couple of minutes passed after Reuben sat down, and there was no addition to his entertainers. Marianna had returned. Rachael had told the main matters of importance—only she omitted to say what specific form the last menace of the black came in. Mrs. Bracton's voice and step were heard alternately in the kitchen and passages; the plates began to clatter: still no Katharine. Doubtful, still, how he must construe her absence, Reuben at last yielded to the painfulness of his anxiety, and inquired,—

"Your cousin is very busy to-day, Marianna?"

"Oh dear, no!" And Marianna and Rachael involuntarily glanced at each other, and smiled. Reuben saw it.

"Only, because I am come, she goes away," said Reuben, smiling too.

A pause followed. Rachael could say nothing; Marianna would say nothing. It was the very question itself.

"By such a token," said Reuben, "one would say I must be

much in favour—esteemed (perhaps she is dressing); or very much out of favour—*hated*."

And that last word signified what too deeply concerned him, to be uttered with any less than the emphasis which told his whole meaning instantly. Marianna turned, and the piercing glances of the two rested for an instant steadily upon each other: and then Miss Bracton went and sat down at his side, and offered him her hand.

"Now, Reuben, tell me honestly—it's a shame to trouble you, so knocked up as you are; but it's best—Do you *really love* Katharine?"

"Above every human being, Marianna. I think her everything——"

"Oh, of course. But *you* needn't tell *us*. *We* know exactly what Katharine is."

"Well, well, Marianna; but——"

"No, no: stop a minute. You may tell Kate by-and-bye that I say I am quite positive about her being in love herself—*quite:* and that as there seems to be nobody else making any pretensions, I think she had better confer a favour and a pleasure on us all by accepting *you*. Can you comprehend? Poor fellow! Pray look at him, Rachael! What is it I must have been saying to him?"

"Marianna! Marianna!" exclaimed Rachael, reddening and laughing, and running away; "what a strange girl you are!"

"Another word, Mr. Kable," added Marianna. "Kate has evidently marched off in a fit of irrepressible fidgets to the top of the hill. You'd better follow—*if you can*. But the dinner's coming in this very instant: mind that. After such a journey, let us all leave you in peace to discuss it. Good-bye for the present."

"Stop, stop, Marianna. Do you think I can let Katharine stay there? It's getting quite cold."

"We'll send for her."

"No, no," said the Australian; "I'll go myself. You know how chary I am of the labour of working people. Good-bye *to you*, Miss Bracton."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

Reuben and Katharine—Beck's Night and Day alone—What Dubbo saw—Beck overtaken by Reuben—Beck alone with the Dead—The Struggle—Escape of Beck—Repursuit—Night in Budawong—Outlaws' Camp—The Fight—Flight—Reconciliation of Marianna and Mr. Hurley.

It was evident, by the pace at which the Australian went up the hill, that he was thinking of meeting with the young lady

on the level of the ridge-top rather than on the steep descent;—a manifestation of good sense, and worthy of a bushman. Another minute, however, and he would have been too late. Katharine had subdued the whirlwind of her thoughts, and stood a few paces off, on the top of the hill, adjusting her shawl, when the tall form and joyful countenance of the bushman came bounding up towards her. A start, and a tremble, and a blush.

"Oh! Mr. Kable," exclaimed Katharine, clasping her hands, and looking from behind them as if she were never to look again; "how you have startled me!" The setting sun shone full upon her face; and it looked neither more nor less than the frail material veil through which could be seen all the loveliness of one of the loveliest spirits that ever glided along the fields of time to a celestial home.

"Dear Katharine!" said the Australian; "come and talk with me for one minute. Take my arm. Katharine,—this many, and many, and many a day I have loved you more than words can tell." And he bent forward, and looked into her face. "Will you be my wife? Ah, I see you will. Dear, beautiful Katharine!"

"I am so surprised to see you at all, Mr. Kable, that I can hardly collect myself. There is a letter gone on for you to Brisbane Water. But it's all well: you are safe."

"Is this the letter? You see it is just as my countryman delivered it. Tell me its contents yourself: it is impossible to read it."

"Oh, it is all well now, since you have arrived safe. But that man has become such a ruthless desperado, and his threats are becoming so shocking——"

"I hear he is threatening you all again, more bitterly than ever."

"No, not mamma; only Marianna and me."

"And why you two only?"

"Oh, I suppose, because," said Katharine, colouring again at the thought, "he thinks it wouldn't so much annoy mamma."

"I don't understand."

"Hasn't Marianna told you what he said?"

"No."

Katharine stammered out the short but difficult explanation. "He says he'll shear off our hair—and make croppies of us."

The Australian stopped short, as if a gulf had opened at his feet,—so short, that his companion could not but turn to look at him, but he recovered himself instantly.

"If he did, I suppose it would grow again. But if I serve his *head* the same way, *that won't*," said the bushman: "and that, or something like that, is the very next thing I mean to do. Dear Katharine! of course you only laugh at it: there is no occasion for fearing *him* any more. I'll not leave these

premises till I ascertain from the blacks where he has been within a few hours before; and then he must be a luckier fellow than I ever met with yet, if I don't run his track down till I've caught him. He's at the length of his tether, now."

"Not, I hope, without sufficient protection for yourself?"

"Protection! Why that Warraghi, and Brown as well, are two as great curs as ever lived. But come; to tell you the truth, I'm fasting some hours. Now, it's settled, you know. Beautiful! Peerless! you belong to me. No answer?—— Katharine!"

"Yes, Reuben; and ever did."

At the cottage was a hutkeeper from a second station, who came in to say that he had seen the black, some time after noon, alone, traversing the bush slowly but steadily toward a lower part of the river, with his eyes fixed on the ground, as if intent on finding something. With this addition to the old shepherd's information, Reuben no longer hesitated what course to pursue; but determined to require the presence of the police at the cottage for a given time—namely, till Mr. Bracton's arrival, and follow Beck's track himself.

Since Mr. Hurley's departure, Mr. Bracton, although senior magistrate, had taken but little share in the business of the bench; leaving it, in all ordinary matters, to Major Jennings, and occupying himself almost exclusively with the business of his farm and stations. As senior magistrate, however, it was competent to him, if he pleased, to assume the direction of the police; and on such an emergency as the present it was indubitable that he would do so. It was only necessary for Reuben, therefore, to make a peremptory demand upon the corporal in the interim: accordingly a man was immediately sent to the township with such a document. It was too late to do anything that night; and, as Beck also must stop when light failed, the delay would not change the relative position of the pursued and the pursuer.

And now the excitement seemed even worse to the family than the suspense and terror had been. In vain the altered aspect of affairs was recurred to; in vain it was again and again suggested how near to home Mr. Bracton must be by to-night: in vain they conned over and over—each in silence, and each in thankfulness as continuous as her silence—the few clear words in which Reuben had told them the sum of the consultation between Mary and himself about the bills: all would not dispel the dread of that which was to come. Nor, if that could have been lost sight of, would all even then have been well. Reuben could not but acknowledge that Mary's heart seemed breaking; nor could they divest themselves of a share in the apprehensions. Nothing was said about Mr. Hurley: Charles's name was so mentioned, too, that Reuben could not but feel impressed that with him also something had gone wrong. Wearied as he

was, and pressed to retire to rest (though he had not mentioned that the night previous to that on which he started, was passed only with such broken sleep as one can take on the open deck of a small boat tossed on a rolling sea), he yet lingered amidst the group: lovely they all were, and sorrowful; but the loveliest of them all, as ever and anon her eyes met his, and she thought what might come to pass by that hour on the morrow, was more than the most sorrowful of them all. Her sorrow was of another order.

Such hours and such subjects bring out all the individuality of womanhood; and the caress of hearts has a magic of its own, transcendent and inscrutable. Could Reuben's thoughts have been circumscribed to that one room, it would have been to him the evening of some eastern dream. And often may we remark the spirit thus trained and prepared, by one extreme of sentiment, for throwing all its energies into the opposite.

And the spirit of a feud was brewing elsewhere, fit to afford scope to such a transition. All along, Beck's shrewd mind had kept in sight the point, that, till conviction, his money was his own—positively as much so as if actually in his own hands; only, under present circumstances, difficult to obtain. But if ever he came to be captured, that instant the difficulty vanished. Well he knew, moreover, what could be effected under such circumstances, in Sydney, by money. And he re-traversed every step of the way they had come with the unwavering vigilance of a hungry bloodhound on the track. When he gave over at night, he had gone but half the way to the Basin of Rocks; but he felt that he could find no fault with himself. He could say that if the object of his search had been on his course, he must have seen it.

Whilst his mind was occupied with the business of the day, he had forgotten everything beside; but when he came to encounter the hours of darkness—sleep flying from his eyes; the hard cold earth beneath him; the bright, stern stars above; the empty bush around, yielding neither home nor help, nor so much as matter for the creation of a hope: when he thought of the long years of hardship and toil he had struggled through, and how their hoarded equivalent had come first to next to nothing, and then (it seemed but too likely) entirely to nothing: when he thought of the change that a few months had made, and how it all came about, and whose hand had touched the mainspring that wrought the change—it seemed to him that he had a right to exact a commensurate retribution. He had never molested Kable. On what ground, then, was he molested by him? Reuben Kable might prepare for whatever retaliation came readiest—on his person—on his property—on his friends—on his life. Why not? Would Kable spare *his?* What he was so forward to give, let him be content to take.

Before the stars were off the sky Beck was a-foot again, and

as soon as it was light enough for the purpose again intent upon his search. But though he turned each larger tuft of grass, and retrod with closer carefulness every patch of stony ground, and searched all round about every spot where they had paused awhile, overthrew the tent-hut, nay, raked the ashes of the fire again and again, 'twas all in vain—mere labour lost. And now only the little space remained between the tent-hut and the Basin of Rocks. Should he go on thither? Was that ghastly object still hanging there, or had the police removed it? It would be nigh nightfall, if not quite, before he got there; for he was leading his horse throughout. If the police had been there, the ghastly thing would be gone—buried out of sight, no doubt; if they had not, there would be himself and the horse: he should not be alone. Once more he set forward.

That same afternoon Dubbo had ridden round that way. Some of his cattle ran at times over to the tops of the loftier hills above, along a leading ridge; and, as he had seen nothing of Warraghi for some days, he looked from a high point that commanded a view of the Basin, down at the spot whence the smoke usually curled up. There was none. By-and-bye, being lower down on the hills, he took a fancy to ride a little nearer still to the edge of the Basin. Still no smoke; and, though he listened long, no sound. At length he rode quite down to the brink near the Ghibber Gunyah. There, close under his horse's head, through the branches of a tree, he saw, swaying heavily to and fro, though still as death in itself, a strange, unaccountable, hideous thing, like a man. Moving further on beside the tree-head, he needed to look but once to know what and who it was. With colourless cheek and trembling hand, and crawling flesh, he turned his horse's head, and pursued his way toward his hut. From that day forward he was an altered man.

The police, meanwhile, had arrived early in the day at the Rocky Springs, and Reuben had started. When the ladies met him at the breakfast-table in the morning, they imagined he had entirely dismissed his determination of the day before: Katharine herself imagined he had, till she had contemplated him for some time. His look and manner, nevertheless, were not those of one who had shrunk from a project, but rather of him who has entirely forgotten one. When the troopers arrived, however, soon after breakfast, off at once came the braces, and on went the narrow dark strap round the loins, just over the hips—an infallible indication in the bushman of intended physical exertion. In ten minutes from that time, with just as much food as he could carry in his jacket-pocket, and his piece carefully charged with a single ball, the Australian was nearly out of sight.

About noon, the hutkeeper who had seen Beck on the day before, pointed out the track. As there was the horse's track as well as the man's, a far less vigilant eye than the natives'

could have kept it at any speed. First he came to the spot where the outlaw lay and ruminated during the night—the ashes still hot, the disturbed surface, the flattened grass in a little swamp beside, where the horse had slept. As he proceeded, there were still surer marks—for it was a lonelier region, where not so much as a single flock of sheep had wandered since the three horses passed first in the opposite direction; their footmarks, imprinted immediately after the rain, could be kept at full stride. So it continued right forward to the tent-hut, in close forest ground, where the gang had camped during the rains. Here he must have been close on Beck's heels; for the light dust of the wood ashes that had been thrown up into the air by the black, in raking them about in the last hopelessness of his search, still lay, unswept by any intervening breeze, upon the leaves of some stunted bushes, half-scorched, that grew within a few feet. The last few miles were the most difficult of the whole: the rains had effaced all the tracks but those of Beck that day, and the sun, now very low and shining aslant through the trees, dazzled and perplexed. Several times the Australian got quite off the track, and had to return and start afresh from some sure point. At length the track entered a scrub covering the point of a hill: the horseman evidently had passed but a very short time before; for the branches of the saplings that had been forced against each other were even yet here and there clinging to one another.

Moving now cautiously and silently, he heard, before he got clear of the thicket, the snort of a horse. Pausing till he was sure he had not yet attracted attention, Reuben once more glided on betwixt the branches. Suddenly he found himself looking through the dense foliage into a great hollow, surrounded by rocks. All seemed still as the grave within: presently there came again the peculiar snort of a horse feeding, and in the next instant the sound of it shaking itself in full equipment of saddle and bridle; the animal was evidently on the same level with himself. He was, however, instantly certain, upon looking into the hollow, that this must be the spot that Rachael had spoken of as having been described to her by the renegade bush-ranger. Leaning cautiously forward, the next glance displayed to him the suspended corpse, and Beck sitting on a log opposite to it at some distance; his hands resting on the muzzle of his piece; his eyes intently rivetted upon the ghastly shape; his hat off, and his whole frame perfectly motionless. Hopping about on the edge of the rock, behind the branches of the tree, was a complete flock of carrion birds: the hawks close to the tree, and venturing openly out, and up into the top limbs; the crows, either intimidated by Beck's presence, or awed by the fiercer birds, farther off among the underwood. The state of the relic of humanity told that they were no new-comers. Presently, a young hawk rose, and sweeping round in the air

till he had gauged his distance, swooped down upon the shoulder of the torn and tattered mass. Up rose Beck: to his shoulder went his gun: before the eye could see its pause, the flash and the crack followed; and down with a shriek came the bird of prey, tearing and tossing about on the ground for half a minute; and then collecting himself, he found his legs, and stretched his neck, and erected himself, and ruffled his feathers, and facing the black defied him. Beck sprang forward—

"Wretch! beast! devil! was man made for you to prey upon?" he shouted, as the indomitable bird flew at his legs; and he beat him to death with the but-end of his piece.

Leaving the hawk to his last struggles, the black turned and retraced his way to the log; and again he rested his hands on the muzzle of his piece, and assumed his motionless attitude. Then, as if suddenly recollecting that the discharge of the other barrel would leave him defenceless, he arose hastily, charged it, and sat down again, as before.

Twilight began to come on: yet still Beck kept his post. The white Australian knew not what to do. First, he wondered what could be the history of the dark, dismal spectacle he saw. Was the man a self-murderer? It looked like it, by the way in which he hung. It looked as if he had reared up the heavy log, and fastening one end of the rope round it, and the other round his own neck, then let the log fall, and thus been drawn up. The manifestation of human feeling made by Beck; the sense that he was in a manner the victim of circumstances; the recollection that he was his countryman, a bold and hardy bushman; that he himself had provoked Beck's threats by the first attack, next came crowding all at once upon Reuben. He felt that he could not shoot a man in cold blood: especially one performing an office of humanity.

Only one other course appeared practicable; for Reuben remained as resolved as ever not to lose the opportunity of putting an end to the black's career of depredation, and of securing Katharine and her friends from his violence. He saw there was an entrance to the Basin by the gorge, a little lower to the right: and Beck's back was towards it. If he could reach him unobserved, and throw himself on him—No! If he failed, Beck would undoubtedly fire, and he had both barrels charged. The only other plan whatsoever was to depend on reaching him unheard, and stunning him with a single blow.

In motion once more, the white man could only with difficulty control his pace sufficiently to conceal from the quick ear of the black his advance round, through the bush to the mouth of the hollow. At length, his way made good so far, he steps lightly and quickly forward. The moon now adding its mellow light largely to that of the departed sun, in a few minutes more, the last, laggard bird will have ceased for the

night his attempt to reach the prey; and Beck will cease his vigil. A little, raised, grassy track leads right along by the very log he is sitting on. Step by step, on tiptoe—at every few paces just an instant's pause, to make sure that the black is not moving—the careful concentration of the powers of vision, to maintain the consciousness of the exact distance—the last pause—the poise of the piece—the spring—ha! their pieces meet in the air. The black's is smashed at the breech, and the white man's lock is gone.

Grimly for an instant they stood face to face: then Reuben, dashing over the log, seizes the black by the collar; who, on his part, clutching the neckcloth of his antagonist, strikes with his right hand. The white man is getting the worst of it. But it is only for an instant: longest in the reach, Reuben lowers his grasp to the swell of the black's chest and holds him out at arm's length. The black wrings the neckerchief round till his assailant is choking; but Reuben has borne him backwards to the tree, and forces him against it and over-balances him, and over both go headlong; the black letting go his grip in the sudden endeavour to save himself. For an instant only, both are free: in that instant, the white man is trying to untie his neckerchief. The black, not seeing or not heeding this, has rushed upon him and seized him in his arms, and is carrying him towards the upturned root of the log, where a number of sharp horns stand out. But he is dealing with as apt a bushman as himself. Reuben is instantly conscious of his design; and burying his right hand in the black's woolly hair, and seizing his chin with his left, he twists his adversary's head almost round: the black staggers, and after a vain struggle for an instant, again falls. On the ground the struggle is renewed; the black hasty and furious, the white man cool and implacable. The still moonlight is all round about; nothing whatsoever moves save that mad heaving mass, which rolls and struggles over and over, sometimes with stifled sounds, sometimes with none. The horse stops grazing, and stands and gazes at it from the top of the rock above the gunyah.

Suddenly the black extricated himself; and no sooner was he extricated than away he bounded. By the side of their Ghibber Gunyah, the outlaws had made a few rude stepping-places up the rock. Thither he flies; the white man after him: as he reaches the top, his pursuer is close at his heels. The black pauses, and catching hold by some strong roots about his mid-height, sinks a little and sets his foot on the white man's chest, and driving him off his foothold, sends him slipping and reeling to the bottom. Not a word had they interchanged. Reuben's greeting was the crash of his piece against the black's; and the black's farewell was the clatter of his horse's heels over the stone-strewn hill.

Exasperated to the highest degree, Reuben returned to the scene of the struggle, and recovering his favourite piece, scaled the rock and proceeded to comprehend the lay of the country, previously to making his way back. The surface presented, he was aware, no serious impediments to a direct course, except the height of some of the ranges: and the full moon made the more immediate management of the feet almost as easy now as at noon.

Before he commenced his return, curiosity prompted him to walk round to the spot beneath which hung that mysterious victim. And now, looking down from close above the log that had outweighed the body, he could see clearly that the feet were much farther from the ground than the rope from either end of the log. That log must have been thrown from above —from the very spot on which he stood. As the thought struck him, he cast his eyes down towards his own feet. There, glittering in the moonlight, lay some small square object. He stooped and took it up; it was Beck's tin case. Why, it must have been he who had hurled over that heavy lump of timber, and have jerked his box from his pocke tin the effort. This explained all: the non-return of the renegade bushranger to Rachael—the loss of Beck's box—the removal of the gang—Beck's attitude, conscious-stricken, when he had descried him. With a fresh and more earnest feeling of the duty of exterminating such a gang, Reuben turned towards the Rocky Springs.

Night-travelling in an imperfectly known part is always difficult, even to the best bushmen: hence, it was not till considerably after sunrise that Reuben reached the Rocky Springs. Refreshment and sleep were now indispensable. But he felt that the price he was obliged to pay for them, in exhibiting the tokens of the ferocity of his contest with the black, was almost too great. Still it was important, if Mr. Bracton had arrived, to see him; and he must now have a horse, and an efficient plan must be concerted for following up the outlaws till they were taken. Reuben would now rather have paid a corps of police himself for six months than permitted Beck to retain his triumphant position. But the worst of all, when he came to make his appearance at the cottage, was the distress of Katharine.

When Reuben rose in the afternoon, Mr. Bracton had arrived; and shortly afterwards home came young Tommy, with his steed something the better in plight for the lesson he had had about his hard riding down. He had news, moreover to tell; Mr. Hurley, on whom he had called coming up (his eye still upon a half-crown, and this time successfully) was intending to follow him the next day, and add his knowledge of the country, and of those likely to be colluding with the outlaws, to the efforts making already for their apprehension.

Reuben advised Mr. Bracton on no account to leave the cottage unprotected by the police for the present, but to be content with adding only a couple of troopers to the pursuing party. It was clear, both by the direction of the tracks from the station whence the horses were stolen, and by the reports that had reached the farm subsequently, that the gang were travelling in a direct line for Budawong mountain; and how fit a place that was for their purposes, and therefore how likely to be their actual destination, Reuben knew well. He therefore proposed to follow them himself at once; and, taking Tommy with him, traverse the mountain alone, whilst Tommy watched the horses down in the open ground. Mr. Bracton, Mr. Hurley, and a couple of troopers could then come on as soon as Mr. Hurley arrived, and camp where Tommy was stationed, till Reuben came out of the mountain. The necessary equipments collected, the arrangement was immediately carried out. Once more, with a bursting heart Katharine flew to the secresy of her chamber, and appeared that day no more.

The most marked features of this gloomy wilderness of woods, ravines, and crags, have already been indicated, The Australian and his companion had to camp for one night on their way thither; and the next afternoon, about two o'clock, they found themselves passing through a forest, covered with coarse, long grass beneath, and thick and lofty foliage over head. This spot is at the very base of the mountain, and partly hemmed in by spurs from it. Outside lay a wide and nearly level plain which they had just traversed, affording good grass and water for the horses. At the edge of the forest and within its shelter, Reuben directed his companion to camp, leaving the horses to feed out in the open ground. Mr. Bracton, on his part, had directions which would conduct him to the spot.

Losing no time, the native took the fresh piece he had borrowed at Mr. Bracton's and commenced his search. Timber has at various times been drawn out of these wild gullies, and his first scrutiny was directed to the various roads thus made into the mountain. But none of them yielded the faintest trace of recent disturbance: forsaken pits and ruined huts generally terminated them within a very short distance.

At length he met with a steep, dry creek or ravine, and there his eye immediately detected recent disturbance of the stones. Next the softer stones revealed the dint of horse-shoes; and, lastly, clinging to one of the shrubs, was a whip lash, that had very recently been detached; for its threads were still fine and distinct at the point, unclotted by rain or heavy dew. This track it became important to run down, for the sky was again becoming overcast, and it had already conducted up on to the top of a moderately high ridge, thickly covered with long grass. The track forward was plain enough at present; but rains

with wind on that elevated spot would soon cast the grass into its natural position and efface it. Reuben hurried forward; but in these thick forests it soon becomes dark, and he had before long to check himself, at the end of the grassy track: the course of the party, be they who they might, at this point entered a brush so thick that, with the little remaining light, it was impossible to discern their footmarks farther. There was no danger of his failing to make his way back; for ten steps on either side of the line he had pursued from the head of the dry creek, would be on to a declivity so precipitous that he must immediately become aware of the deviation. He therefore sat down, rather to rest awhile and smoke, than for any other purpose.

As he sat smoking, he could not but reflect on the chequered fortunes that were at that instant progressing with the various individuals more immediately within the circuit of his own observations; his poor, heart-broken Mary; Katharine no less dear, and for the hour even yet more agitated; Marianna, so long so unhappy, now on the point of obtaining an opportunity (one he had been earnestly imploring her not to throw away) of rectifying an exaggerated sentiment, and becoming once more the happy and cherished friend of the object of her own first affection; Rachael, so beautiful and loving, and yet lone: on the other hand, Willoughby perhaps no more a member of the race of earth; Mr. Bracton struggling; Martin Beck and his gang accumulating over themselves a weight of retributive influence, which, within a few hours, would probably crush them into irretrievable perdition. At that very instant there came a sound upon the breeze, so fitful and sharp, so like the mocking merriment of fiends, that it made him spring up on to his feet. It seemed like a scornful answer to his last thought. Again all was silent. But after a time there came occasionally from the same quarter, sounds something like the lowing of distant cattle, and yet so unlike, that he doubted if such they could be.

More and more intensely and anxiously, each time the sounds reached him, the Australian listened. He knew how singularly the configuration and other circumstances of the surface of the earth modify sounds, so that a sound familiar to the ear in a plain is often scarcely recognisable amongst broken forest-clad hills. He knew no sounds whatever exactly like these that now reached him. Cattle would scarcely be where they came from: but bushrangers would. At his feet, but hidden in the darkness for miles forward, lay gully and depth, and cold wet gulfs rifted into the earth, their intermediate ridges peering up between, all clad with such a tangled mesh of mighty trees, wreathed round by tough, sinewy vines, that, as each old giant rotted at its root, the vines still held it in its place—the dead amidst the living. But he knew that through

the very heart of that terrible wilderness the sea-coast aborigines had a track by which they visited the interior settlements. Might it not be a party of them, camped some two or three miles a head? And now the darkness began to grow thick, and so rayless from above, that fire-light could plainly be distinguished at the very distance and quarter the sounds came from. More; it was the light of brushwood of some size: a thin and exquisitely purple glow, such as would result from the heaping together of large junks of some species of brush timber. Therefore it was not a black's fire, which is always made of small sticks. Again he listened; and at length heard plainly, but faint beyond expression, the *chop—chop—chop* of an axe: the heavier tool of the white man. Though the profound silence preserved the sound thus far, it could be compared to nothing but *itself whispered:* it fell on the ear like the faint tap of the death-watch.

He now felt convinced that the shouts of merriment had come from the party at the fire; that they were white men; that they had reached it some time that day by the track he had run down thus far; and that they were horsemen. This was all sound induction: but to it nothing further could be added, at present; except that just such a party as he had found within, he had been pursuing from without. It only remained for him to make his way back to where he left young Tommy, and have some supper, and light the pipe, and roll himself in his 'possum cloak,—he could go to sleep without rocking.

The weather held up: no rain fell; but the night was gusty and wavering, and the wind sounded moaningly. To all of them, wheresoever they were, it seemed as if they were waiting, expectant of sorrowful tidings. To Mr. Hurley, as he lay at the inn of the settlement where he stopped that night, the short squalls, as they flew ruffling past his window, seemed to presage some dash of unexpected calamity. To Marianna, as she lay still ruminating, they seemed to say, "Thoughtless! it will soon be otherwise with thee!" To Katharine it said, "Lady, know this:—love so prankt, so playful, is but a false guide that lures into a vale of tears." To Mary, as it bore up from the wide, wild sea, the boom of Barrenjueh, it uttered but one word—one syllable: it murmured again, and again, and again,—"Death! death! death!" Mr. Bracton and Mrs. Bracton too listened; and spoke of their sons that were either on or under the main: and, before he slept, Reuben Kable also listened: but he was out beneath the open sky, upon the cool, sweet earth, and ever and anon could see the bright and everlasting stars betwixt those rolling clouds, and hear sweet murmuring waterfalls amidst the wail of winds.

As soon as it was light enough to move about, Reuben, leaving his young scapegrace countryman (who, by-the-bye,

was a very willing lad, and excellent company) to make up the fire and put down the quart-pots, walked out into the flat to make sure that the horses had not strayed: and then, after breakfast, telling Tommy to stick to his post till Mr. Bracton's arrival, he took his gun and once more ran the dry creek up to the grassy ridge; followed that out to his last night's station, and finally proceeded to trace the course of the party into the thick brush.

There was a good passage for a single horseman (but no more), partly natural, partly cleared by the few travellers whom the blacks had conducted that way to and from the coast. Thus the party having travelled in file the day before, and not spread, it was impossible to discover their number. For nearly three miles down, the path kept on; up and along the sides of hills—everywhere amidst massive trees, and tangling vines canopied overhead, to the utter exclusion of the sunbeams: and, though it was now summer, dank and chilly as the grave. Here, a solitary pheasant, caught scratching up the herbless earth, flew terrified away; there, a gaunt companionless bush-dog, hunting down a creek for cray-fish, surlily snarled at being disturbed, or uttered his yet more dismal and prolonged howl: else, nothing moved; nor was there any sound. The Australian kept on his way.

At length he drew near the bottom of a long fall, and began to see along the level at the foot. The brush terminated with the declivity; and then a large forest-flat expanded forwards and far off to the right; but at the left, from the precise point where he came down, was high broken ground, with a precipitous rocky face, running straight ahead from where he stood. A second glance showed smoke, lying about in the motionless atmosphere of the hill-shielded concavity. A few more cautious steps, and by stooping he could see, at about half gunshot, a large tarpaulin arranged for a tent-hut. The fire was so low that only a faint mist of smoke could be discerned arising. The face of the hut was mainly towards him, and its back was against the enormous barrel of a prostrate gum—one at least five feet in diameter. Not a living thing seemed to be stirring. Shifting his position a little, he could see several saddles, and a number of small arms of various sorts, but chiefly muskets, roughly piled beneath the shelter of the tarpaulin; and upon the ground at the inner end the raised mass of the occupants sleeping, covered with their blankets. The whole of the space between the range and the hut—indeed the whole of the little track of low, rich forest—was covered with a harvest of long, rank grass; and, lastly, there were two dark objects beyond the fire, like square half-gallon bottles lying on their sides. It seemed certain that this was the party who had been carousing last night, and almost equally so that they were the bushrangers. All speculation, however, was

shortly exchanged for certainty. Forth came Beck, and after putting the logs together, proceeded to dress himself. The white native could not but smile, as he observed the stiffness and evident discomfort of some of Beck's motions: it was evident that his own sensations ever since the struggle were fully rivalled by the black's.

Beck did not see him: he appeared to have been drinking, and looked and moved like one moody and downcast. After he had dressed, he stood for a few minutes with his hands behind him, and his back to the fire, alternately yawning and looking up amongst the tree heads, or turning and fixing his eyes intently on some fine gum-tree, whose barrel would once have been a prize to him. Finally, he went into the hut again, and began rousing his mates. Reuben took the opportunity to hasten up the hill-side into the cover of the brush, and proceeded back to his camping-place.

It was nearly noon, but no one had arrived. Hour passed after hour: still the same. At length he despatched young Tommy to endeavour to meet the expected reinforcement, and urge them forward. There were certain settlers in the line they would follow, with whom Mr. Bracton and Mr. Hurley were intimate, and at some of whose farms they were sure to call.

And now the questions presented themselves, what had the gang done with their horses? How far off where they? Could they be suddenly pounced on before they had time to get their horses and saddle? But nothing he had observed presented the means of solving the principal problem,—as to the probability of their being able to make good their escape. To and fro he walked, smoked, pondered, gathered wood, went to the horses, came back, walked to and fro, made a pot of tea, smoked again. "What, in the name of fortune, is keeping them? What a slow-going, crawling set these English are!" But then he bethought himself that Katharine was now fairly his own. *She* was English. He must forget henceforth all these scoffing phrases he had got hold of on that subject. Still, this was not the main thing now: it did not bring him a bit nearer to Martin Beck and his gang. Well, *every* great and good thing must be struggled for; and waited for, till the struggle was gone through.

The whole day passed, and they came not. That night he had to keep his watch alone. But next morning, about ten o'clock, as he stood at the edge of the little plain, he saw the large figure of Mr. Bracton emerge from the opposite bush, Mr. Hurley riding beside him, and two troopers behind them again.

Mr. Hurley had not arrived till a day after he had expected to reach the Rocky Springs; but they had lost no time after he did arrive, riding on immediately he had taken some refreshment.

It now only remained to decide what method of attack was to be pursued. The Australian held it to be best to wait for the arrival of Tommy; and, consigning to him the care of all the horses, proceed on foot, and make a sudden dash upon the party and fight it out hand to hand. Mr. Bracton thought the same. Mr. Hurley considered that by so doing there was every chance given to the outlaws to escape, and that riding into them before they could get time to mount, was the only course that could be depended on for preventing their escape; or, at all events, the escape of some of them. The troopers maintained the same. As they had been so long under Mr. Hurley's orders, and Mr. Hurley stood more in the position of habitual command towards them than the Australian and Mr. Bracton, the two latter had to give way. Reuben, however, adhered to his own preference for his own part, and hiding his and Tommy's saddles, &c., in a scrub, went with them on foot.

It was one of those mornings when, after a brilliant sunrise, the heavens grew cloudy and the air chill and damp. And now the "mistiful Budthawong" was making good its title to the name. Not only was all wet, desolate, and dark in its mighty glens, and along its bleak wood-clad ridges, but one of those dense and magnificent deluges of mist already described was rolling over it, till the topmost heights themelves were enswathed; and traversing its surface was like walking about in the clouds. But the native's way once trodden could not be mistaken, and he led his companions fairly to the foot of the long fall of brush,—the brink of the forest where he had seen the camp of the outlaws.

It was impossible now to discern the tent from the foot of the hills: the fog was so dense that not above half the distance could be penetrated by the eye. But after they had listened a little while, the party could hear the rattle of the tin pots, and occasionally the sound of a voice: the bushrangers seemed to be at dinner. The sounds impressed them all with a distinct idea of the exact direction the hut lay in. They therefore prepared to make a headlong dash. Mr. Bracton had pistols only; Mr. Hurley, pistols and a rifle; Reuben, a double-barrelled fowling-piece; and the police, carbines, pistols, and their cutlasses.

"*Now*," said Mr. Hurley, just loud enough to be heard by his own party, but not by the bushrangers: and off went the whole line abreast, Reuben at the extreme left, on foot; all the rest on horseback. Suddenly, at about half-way across the flat, Reuben saw that he was running full upon a deep creek bank, hidden from his former notice by the coarse, high grass; and, at the same instant, all the horses either stopped short or were forcibly reined back on to their haunches by their riders. There was a sudden confusion in the bushrangers' camp, and

then the voice of Beck heard calling, cheerily, "Don't be afraid of 'em! Don't be afraid of 'em! The horses can't get across the creek." And almost before that was said, the report of a heavy piece was heard from the gang—probably, by the sound, a musket—shattering Mr. Hurley's right arm between the elbow and shoulder. The soldiers instantly fired together. Not an object could be seen to aim at; but it was evident one of the shots had taken effect upon the clustered gang; for there was a loud talking amongst them, mingled every now and then with the deep, sad moaning of a man in great agony. Then could be heard Beck's voice again—"Carry him behind the tree: you're hurting him, Rooney: lift him gently." The soldiers had loaded again, and, whilst Reuben and Mr. Bracton were helping Mr. Hurley (who was bleeding profusely) off his horse, *bang, bang*, went the two carbines a second time. The bushrangers answered only by a general laugh; for, whilst they were carrying their wounded comrade off at one side of the hut, the soldiers had fired at the other.

Leaving Mr. Hurley with Mr. Bracton, the Australian advanced to the edge of the creek, to look for a crossing-place. The bushrangers were now firing again: but it was quite a matter of indifference where any of the attacking party stood, or whither they went, for there was not the slightest possibility of the bushrangers descrying them through the fog. The soldiers, however, in the cool sagacity of military instinct, kept now and then changing their positions; whilst their antagonists after once they began again, continued firing from the same spot. Reuben found the creek banks, on both sides, the mere, bare, upright faces of a fissure in the mother rock, and its superincumbent stratum. Following the water down to the right, he, however, observed that where the forest-ground terminated, the horse tracks again became visible. There was no probability, or, indeed, apparently, possibility, of the outlaws assuming the offensive; unless they knew of some crossing-place higher up, which appeared unlikely, as the horse-tracks were downwards. He, therefore, hurried on to try if he could find a practicable crossing-place. Both parties still kept rattling away. His own party, however, he knew must still have the long odds in the contest with them; for they kept moving at every discharge, whilst the bushrangers did not; and, from their tact in loading, they were firing full twice to the outlaws' once. His search produced no result, after being carried out for a full half-mile; till he began to feel in danger of being thought unnecessarily absent.

The creek, some length further down, seemed even to make a sweep right back, almost as if it protected them in rear as well as in front. As he hastened back, he could hear the desperadoes mingling cheers, and shouting wild gibes with their shots. As he came up, and began to gather his thoughts

some final mode of action, he heard their last salute. It was from Beck: "There; soldiers! my chaps are going to knock off for a smoke: you'd better have one yourselves. Don't try to sneak us, though. I'm on sentry, and the pieces are all ready." And with this, as if in a sort of wantonness, he slammed off both his own barrels in the same instant; and both the shots went mingling in one hum (it seemed within six inches) past his countryman's face. The answer was just what might be expected—the instantaneous double report of Reuben's piece levelled in the same line back again. But nothing followed, except a fresh laugh.

Mr. Hurley, meantime, exhibited the most startling symptoms—rapid hæmorrhage, and faintness so fast increasing, that his self-possession seemed every now and then on the point of giving way. With Reuben's assistance holding his arm, Mr. Bracton, however, now succeeded in binding a pledget of rag sufficiently firm down to check almost entirely the bleeding. It was clearly now a duty to get Mr. Hurley out of the brush, and to a place where he could be attended to. One of the soldiers' horses was badly wounded in the flank: so badly that it was impossible to get him up the hill. They therefore were about to take upon themselves the office of carrying their former commander up the ranges, whilst Reuben and Mr. Bracton managed the horses, when Mr. Hurley seemed to wish for water. Again Reuben tried the creek, this time up the flow of the water. About a hundred yards up, he found a spot where men might climb both down the near bank and up the opposite: though not horses. After drinking, Mr. Hurley expressed a conviction that he would shortly be able to sit his horse; and Reuben, as the firing still paused, went once more to examine the crossing-place he had found; the corporal with him. They crossed, and stole to the edge of the bluff, but there again were checked: there seemed no way of descent. But as the bushrangers still continued inactive, they traversed the edge for some distance. By-and-by their advance was checked by just such another creek, or else the same returned back. As they stopped and looked about them, there came the sounds of a mounted party riding hurriedly some distance off amidst the dense mist on the opposite bank; and at length they thought they heard the sound of the voice of Beck. Further attention made the surmise certainty.

It was now evident the gang had once more had fortune on their side. No more shots were fired by them: nor any returned, when several were directed against their tent. Borrowing Mr. Hurley's horse, Reuben hastily ran the creek round, to satisfy himself what exactly their position had been. He found that, just as it had appeared to him, it at length swept right back; the backward channel in some places not a

hundred yards from the forward, and so on, along at the very back of their encampment; where there was a good crossing-place on to another track of forest. They had, therefore, merely ceased firing, under pretence of having a smoke, to get time to collect their horses and escape. That they had ridden away there was no room to doubt. There were the tracks of all the horses and the men's feet where they had saddled, on the side furthest from their hut, or that round which he had ridden; together with an old handkerchief saturated with blood: and then forward through the forest their horses' hoof-marks in a body departing.

Passing over the easy crossing-place, he found himself under the bluffs he had traversed above with the corporal. Thus the creek hemmed in a very long narrow point of forest; everywhere but at the end, where it was equally inaccessible from the barrier of rock. It appeared to be a point of land formed on a long tongue of rock, that had settled into the soft ground between the two lines of the creek. Advancing toward the hut, he found it forsaken. There were no indications of more than one of the outlaws having been wounded: blood on one spot before, and on one behind the tree. And now, on examining the great old tree barrel against which they had reared their tent, the secret of their impunity became revealed. A powder-horn and several lots of ball and slugs were lying at the back of the tree, whilst the front was torn in a score of places by the balls of the soldiers. So that they had stood, loaded, and fired from behind the tree in perfect security, after once their position was taken up: whilst they had, at the same time, so chosen the position of their camp as to have the only crossing-place by which they could be reached, nearest to themselves and the most concealed from those who might attack them.

The steady fortitude of Mr. Hurley's character at length enabled him to muster resolution sufficient to carry him through the task of riding back into the open ground. Here the fresher atmosphere and some slight refreshment still further re-invigorated him; and, by sending forward to an adjacent settler's, an easier conveyance than his horse was procured. A few miles further, and a gentleman of the medical profession, himself a settler, resided: here, his arm received the necessary surgical treatment; and from thence to the Rocky Springs—whither Mr. Bracton insisted upon his proceeding whenever he moved at all, and whither, therefore, Mr. Hurley felt quite competent to proceed at once—every accommodation was easily secured.

Tommy had come up before the return of the party out of the mountain; and at his countryman's request, and on promise of a handsome reward, he undertook the task of following the outlaws at a distance, and ascertaining their line of route,

and, if possible, their intentions. Having laid Reuben under contribution for all the tobacco he had about him, the young black fellow pursued his quick and stealthy way into the mountain, whilst the white men made their homeward journey.

To Reuben, as the speediest horseman, fell the task of hastening on, to break to the family at the cottage the tidings of what had occurred: a step fully necessary, considering the possibility that an exaggerated account might be conveyed to them by travellers, or the soldiers, before Mr. Hurley's arrival.

And now it was all in vain for Marianna to attempt to conceal how much she had all along loved Mr. Hurley. When the tidings were told, though carefully told, first there was a show of the unflinching firmness of her father; then came strange varyings of the countenance, and at last, a choking flood of tears.

"Oh!" said Reuben, "you have quite spoilt it now. Hurley would give five hundred pounds to see this! but as he can't see it, he shall hear of it to the slightest particular. Now you had much better make a virtue of necessity, and tell him yourself. Will you?"

But it was useless to attempt to extract an answer. Marianna scarcely comprehended what she was asked. She only knew that Mr. Hurley was badly wounded; that he had always been faithful to her and just to others, and loving, and long-suffering, and forgiving, when she was only capricious and harsh.

Nor by the time of his arrival—her thoughts now willing to be arranged aright—had she failed to reflect that he yet remained unthanked, unpaid by her for a momentous service. It was his anxiety to do justice—his anxiety to protect the interests of her family, that had led him to visit the Welshman at the gang; to come back and have a conference with Mr. Moses; to dash off from that very conference at the head of the police, on hearing of the attack of the blacks; and thus bring to bear on her parent's and cousin's and her own rescue the double energies of Reuben and himself. All this she had forgotten before. Reuben was the ostensible agent; but Mr. Hurley she now saw was the true mover of the agency. Had he been other than he was, Reuben would have found them all too late. She felt, with deep compunction, that she, of all persons in the world, ought not to depreciate Mr. Hurley's rigorous and unbending resolves to be in all things a just man. That law of his character which she had so bitterly antagonized had been the minister of protracted existence to hers. She had been persecuting the spirit that had preserved her life.

And when Mr. Hurley arrived, everything that a generous and impassioned heart could do to atone for its error, Marianna did. No unworthy hesitation, no stinted amend could

be charged against her: nothing that could benefit him was too trivial for her to think of—too troublesome for her to perform. *Of course,* he hardly remembered that anything had befallen him. Not so, Marianna: she could not forget it.

"You shall go after no more bushrangers, Mr. Hurley. If your office necessarily involves it, you must give the office up. I'd sooner be your hutkeeper, whilst you shepherded your own sheep, than know you were going into such a danger as this again."

"So that you would still like to have your own way—*sometimes.*"

"No: I'll never insist rashly, again."

"Say—in the very point you have just declared your will upon. Wasn't there a *must* in it?—I thought I heard one. If I should happen to demur, and still insist on earning my living in the manner I think best, wouldn't you try and get your way?"

"Ay, perhaps on such a point as that."

"Even though it should go near to separate us again. Do you hear that, Mrs. Bracton?"

"Oh! pray, pray don't. I never will do anything so unkind again: believe me."

Thus passed by several days, and then came the shrewd young aborigine with his tidings.

"Well, Tommy?"

"Well, Reuben?"

"Any news?"

"Yes: me murry hungry. I been go a good way. I find Beck camped close up Curroc-billy that first night, and stop there all next day. I watch him. Old Morgan think he keeps a good look-out: but it no use: I always see bushranger, but never bushranger see me."

"Well; but which way are they gone?"

"D—n it! a'n't I telling you now. You're too much in a hurry. Beck stop in ranges close up Curroc-billy, because Warraghi can't travel. Warraghi shot, you know. They can hardly make him come on out of Budthawong. So that die and bury him in a little sandy creek. After they go away, I been go and see his grave: not very deep: native dog pull him out direcaly."

"Come, come, Tommy, now cut the yarn as short as you can."

"Well, I do. You shouldn't speak like that, Reuben. I go on then till next night, and then 'nother night; and then that camp close up grog-shop, and Morgan Brown go in out of bush and buy some grog, and that corrobbera a good deal; and I hear Beck tell the rest they shall go down along-a Brisbane Water, where I come to you that time when young lady sit down in parlour along-a you, and they all say *yes,*—same as

Englishman always say. That going to take away your boat I believe—I think—and go to 'nother country."

At this termination of the tale, Katharine, who was leaning on Reuben's arm, turned and looked at him: already his face had taken the hue of death.

"Oh! Katharine," he said, scarcely articulating his words, "give the black boy what I promised him—I forgot what it was; he'll tell you. They're three good days ahead of me, go which way I will."

Reuben was thinking of Mary, not of the boat.

"I shall never catch them this time till it's too late. I might have thought of this if I hadn't——"

He was about to say, "thought too much of my own selfish gratification;" but he silenced the thought, lest it should obliquely wound the too sensitive spirit which had committed itself to his care. Within a quarter of an hour he had bidden her adieu.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

Positions of all—Mary's Dreams—Homeward bound—"Jolly Will Howard"—The Black and his White Pursuer—The Bush afire—Mary and Margaret—The old Nurse stricken—Tony's Warning—The Black's Plans—The Robber's Fate—Willoughby's Return—Conclusion.

THE main actors in the fierce drama, as well as those to whose lot fell the meeker but more painful task of contemplation and endurance, were now all holding in their breath: these to obtain power to bear; those, power to do.

The plan of the gang was settled. It was a last effort; and men in mid-life know well that when a great thing has to be done, and can be but once done, it ought to be done thoroughly. It was impossible for the black, with any chance of safety, to travel with his comrades by day along the high roads; yet the high roads were the only course by which they could hope to keep time by the forelock in their undertaking. They therefore separated from him, and travelled as single stockmen by day; and he, resting and hiding in the bush by day, rode ahead the same stages by night; the top of Brisbane Water being appointed as their final rendezvous. Reuben Kable, sensible of the utter inadequacy of his means to his end, had no alternatives but to either quail and give way and sink at the very moment when the destinies of all he admired and loved hung on his sole strength; or mould his plan as perfectly as he could, and then give himself into it as so much molten iron. Nor was he deficient of sagacity for the one, or of decision for

the other. Deliberation yielded but a single counsel: a long day, and *speed;* a short night, and *sleep*. Henceforth it was so. And there was need. Beck had menaced hitherto: now he neither told his comrades, nor comprehended himself what he meant to do: his wrath refused to be limited to a form,—his only feeling was a maddening desire to reach the field for letting it loose.

Mary's first feeling, when her brother so abruptly left her, was astonishment at the sudden change that had taken place in things; then, naturally hopeful, and especially so in everything she saw Reuben putting his hand to, she gave way to uncontrolled delight, and flew to Margaret to tell her who would be Reuben's wife: and then (ere very long, alas!) she bethought her who and what *she was herself*. And by morning, again, even Reuben and Katharine had become only secondary images in her mind. Then she even forgot how day was passing after day without bringing her any tidings about them. All day long the dismal, weary, surging sound of the engulfing sea kept roaring in her ears, till she scarce took notice of what was passing before her eyes: and when she slept (if such a condition can be called sleep) the visual organism avenged itself, and saw the pageantries of an eternal sorrow rolling past for evermore. Sometimes she thought she was wandering in a cold place, where a pall-covered coffin lay upon an earthen floor, and that she wanted to raise the pall and lift the lid and creep in beside the dead, but some one from behind her held her hand, and she could not: she struggled,—and in the agony of her heart she fought to have her will,—and still could not. Then she thought she was going about on a rainy morning, miserably clad, through the wet, pitiless bush, till she came to a little hut, where there was smoke and a fire; and when she had begged and prayed a long while, she heard one coming to the door to let her in. It was Willoughby. He was smiling as usual. But directly he saw who it was, he shut the door in her face; and though she knocked and knocked, he would not come to her again; and after a long, long broken-hearted importunity, till she was quite ashamed, she sank down at the door-side: by-and-by Reuben came up, with a number of the men, looking for her, and took her up in his arms and carried her home, and she knew she was in her own room again; and opened her eyes, and saw it was so. So it went on, day by day and night by night,—dreams mingling with realities, and the mind gliding to and fro, between imagination and perception, till she was becoming altogether so different from herself—so strange—that even the feeble eyes of Margaret saw it, and could see it so constantly and clearly that wonder began to be lost in fear.

And yet in that dark hour (strange fortunes of men!) there was plunging onwards heavily, from the cold South Seas

toward sunnier regions of the earth, that well-navigated bark she had longed through many a dreary day and night to hail, and once more set her foot on in the still waters of Sydney cove: the skipper much as usual, only a little lighter in person, and much heavier in purse. Oh, that Mary could have heard (unpolished though they were) the anticipations, and the jokes, and the prophesies of the crew! and boy Jack's response to the mate's "Come, cheerly, boys, cheerly, boys," as they roused taut the backstays, and got all ready for going into port:—

"The Skipper's sixpen'orth is waiting at home;
Cheerly, boys, cheerly, boys, pull 'ee, hoyhoy!
She lists to the wind, and she watches the foam;
Cheerly, boys, cheerly, boys, pull 'ee, hoyhoy!
And she's trim as a midsummer 'DAISY' in bloom;
Cheerly, boys, cheerly, boys, pull 'ee, hoyhoy!
'It's long, my lad—long, my lad—long till you come.'
Cheerly, boys, cheerly, boys, rous'ee, hoyhoy!
'Stick close to your binnacle—jam the blocks home—
For it's long, my lad—long, my lad—long till you come!'"

But time and space have laws; and they are not the laws of breaking hearts. On the other hand, those who knew the landward side of the case had least hope of it. Mr. Hurley was wearing out day and night in a fever of apprehension; unwilling to speak his thoughts, unable to conceal them; unable to mingle in the struggle; unable to restrain his mind from holding it in perpetual presence; administering hope to Katharine, exhibiting all his fears to Marianna and Rachael, and Mr. and Mrs. Bracton. Katharine herself could not be said to either think or feel. Her sensations were like those of one who is buried in a trance, and must bear, but cannot tell the agony: it was the swoon of the volition beneath the overstress of the forces that should call volition into activity—the benumbness of every faculty save a dreadful consciousness. Her waking was a stupor; her sleep became an atrocious vision. They spoke to her; and minutes afterwards she heard them. They were silent; and suddenly she made answer to something that had never been said.

And as the matter became more widely talked of, and still more composed and uninterested minds canvassed its probabilities, more and more unfavourable became the verdict upon the probability of Reuben Kable overtaking the outlaw. The troopers at the township simply and at once pronounced it a lost case. "The young man," they said, "might kill half a dozen horses and himself to boot, but he'd never overtake Beck, with the advantage of such a start."

So, too, said the hands on the farm, ever interested in such matters. A struggle in any form betwixt the free and bond is always a subject that arouses attention, and usually partisan-

ship, in the huts. In this case, however, there was very little of the latter: Beck was so unequivocally wrong, and his menace against the females so revolting to manly spirit, that no one thought of vindicating him. And whilst Katharine's graceful and retiring character had gradually drawn upon her a universal, though equally unconscious, gaze of admiration and reverence, Reuben's, as full of directness, valour, and strength, had operated as forcibly in his favour. But day came and day went, without tidings. Long and varied were the speculations; and only one thing seemed certain to all,—that whenever the two men met next, it would be like the crash of two gigantic ships encountering in full career at sea, amidst the uncontrollable forces of a hurricane. Likewise it was felt to be to a certain extent their own business;—Miss Katharine belonged to *them;* and where was there another like her? And was not the Australian her protector?—possibly not an idea consonant to refined etiquette: but it was their idea, and a fact, which is everything. Every evening there was a gathering after supper to canvass the affair over and over again. Still the conclusion recurred,—"We must wait: we shall hear by-and-by." For the first time since his installation the Welshman lost sight of his office in the urgings of his individuality.

"I give half a gallon of rum to-morrow night to drink Mr. Reuben's health. Who go to the township for it, after we knock off work?" said he.

"I," said Turpin; "only I must have the loan of that there horse of your'n."

"Done!" And next evening, about the same hour, their usual escape-valve for over-excited feeling was in full play. But it sufficed not: the yarn went on, and the grog went round, but three-fourths of the men were standing instead of sitting as usual.

"Come, Turpin, you is always sing very well," said the Cambrian; "give us one stave, if you like. It is no use, lads, to drop down. I know the best man sure to have the best luck in the end."

Turpin's busy but feeble mind refused its task. He could think of nothing fit for the hour. He could not forget the parlour at Brisbane Water, and Mary; it agitated even him to think of that sylph-like girl in the hands of the desperate and malevolent black; and the more he thought the more he bewildered himself.

"Come," said the Welshman. "I think she is go to sleep, lads," he added, after waiting some time; "you see her? She is not sing to-night! but she will always sing before; too much, sometimes."

"The chap isn't in such luck as you are," put in one of the hands. "*He* isn't going to be married before the month's out."

"Well," said the overseer, "I suppose the 'oman was make for the man, and she is make for the 'oman. You cannot get a wife, my man, or you 'ood ne'er grumble at another to get one."

"No offence meant, Mr. Thomas," interposed another; "and none should be taken. Attention! Silence for Turpin!"

But the Considerate Man was still for once baffled. The half-delirious regions of his indefinite morality yielded nothing heroic; but he got as near to the legitimate as the least spurious could be, and sang a sort of bacchanalian dirge for—

JOLLY WILL HOWARD.

Jolly Will Howard
To his grave's gone;
May the earth rest lightly
His body on.

Never better man
Served the "Dials" yet,
Than honest Will Howard,
At the "Duke of Somerset."

None beat his liquors—
None ever drawed such beer;
To Epsom, Ascot, and Goodwood,
He went every year.

With short, broad apron,
White, on his belly round,
King of all the L. V.'s
Will was long ago crowned.

We done it in the bar,
One races' night,
After the "Duchess" had cut,
Will showing fight.

One bumper more
To jolly, jolly Will,
Where he lies on his broad back.
Come, brothers, fill!

"And that there same thing is what I *suspect* we'll have to do for the Cornstalk," he added, as he finished.

"What!" exclaimed the Welshman, "she double her up head to heels, like a fish that is too long to go in a barrel. I am sure of it. I can do it myself. If I was there now, lads, I 'ood leave the black alone, and see what Mr. Reuben can do to her."

"Ay, lads," said Turpin," this is about the time they'll be settling it."

And they knew so at the cottage, as well as at the huts. Mrs. Bracton made the tea; the form began; some drank more, some less, as they could:—all save Katharine. After a vain

struggle to make no inroad on custom and decorum, and nearly choking herself, she put down her cup, looked for an instant at her uncle, beside whom, on the sofa, she was sitting, and then fell into his arms, and sobbed and wept past all comforting.

It was the height of summer; a regular westerly gale was on, and had been for some days blowing from the arid wastes of the interior, parching vegetation, fevering and exciting animal life. Though the sun was nigh upon going down, the evening seemed as sultry as the noon had been. The black stood with his jacket and waistcoat off, and his shirt turned back, laving his face and arms and breast in the cool water at the head of the lake-like bay, the sloop at anchor about four miles below, and its owners' home on the bankside. "Four hours more!" he said. "Those fellows, surely, will not be long."

It was the silence of the battle-eve: around him grew, above him rose the hundred thousand mighty gums, through which aforetime he had strolled, axe in hand, with nothing on his mind but the simple care of selecting a tree. Now? Why that past was like an infant's dream! He turned from the water, and looked back through the forest. There, within little more than a gun-shot, lay one whom he remembered a magnate in the land, proudly sleeping in his own mausoleum. Who had destined him to any meaner grave? Was he not a man? Who could prove that white in colour was greater than black in colour? Then, as he turned with folded arms, and eyed the sloop and the farm, the true stress of the case recurred, and true African hate: and clapping his hands, he sprang, and hardened his muscles, and examined them; and seized his garments, and slunk back again into the cluster of bushes where he had lain all day.

The white native looked mournfully at the setting sun; but rode on. He had braced every nerve, and toned it into unison, and that was the forlorn hope of his soul; so he sat his horse as it tore on up the rocky pathway, and plunged as furiously down again, or swept monotonously clattering along the roads cut through the mighty forest solitudes—he sat it still and imperturbable as a statue; meaning so to sit till he threw himself off it on to the scene of conflict.

The bush-fire was almost all over the country. Everywhere there was either the roaring of the flames, or the blackened skeletons of the trees which the fire had already scathed, or vast solitary tracts awaiting (as it seemed to the imagination, in breathless suspense) the rush of the fiery deluge. Over-head, along the tree-tops, the heavy westernly gale kept up one long unbroken roar; the smoke pervaded and overhung everything; and the feeble sunlight that struggled through it was only a gloomy purple glare, dazzling like light, and confusing like darkness. Even the wild and venomous things gendered and

bred in dark and hidden places, rushed out, scared by the urgent warnings of their instinct, and crossed the path, and dared the enmity of man, rather than abide the search of the coming whirlwind of fire.

"It's coming down headlong from the mountains," said Beck, as he once more ventured from his hiding-place to the water's edge; "nothing could chance better. It'll be among the fences at the back of the farm in a couple of hours' time: and then all the hands aboard the sloop, except a single man or so, will hasten ashore to help them on the farm to save the fences. There'll be their dingy at the wharf for us to go aboard with, and the sloop as good as empty. She lies too far out for them aboard to hail the shore and give the alarm."

Beck had made the voyage to and fro between Sydney and the various other harbours on the coast scores of times; and had been used to the navigation of the wide inlets of the part from his childhood, and was nearly as much at home on one of these little crafts as his countryman: so that he felt no doubt of working the *Mary Kable*, with the assistance of the single man that would be left aboard, and his own comrades. Whilst there was all night to get the few miles out to sea, and a first-rate wind, both for running down the bay and then standing off shore. There was no doubt that, the craft once in their hands, they could be clean out of sight of land before daylight next morning. Impatient as he was, he knew he might fairly expect another hour to elapse before his comrades joined him. And, cheered with so much of promise, he certainly ought to take that patiently. Once more he shrouded himself in the bit of brush, and lay listening for the usual stifled *koo-eh*.

Mary and Margaret sat in the front verandah at their work. They knew that the bush was on fire in the mountains, and that the wind was blowing it towards the farm; but they knew the course that was always taken to stay its advances, when it was perceived to be really coming. So that the circumstance caused them no uneasiness—scarcely, indeed, elicited a remark. But at length Margaret said, as she looked down the ground—

"The smoke comes thicker, bairn, than it did in the afternoon."

"I told them," answered her companion, arousing, after the lapse of some moments, from her abstraction, "to be sure and go and burn the grass round Willoughby's fences and ours, if they saw it coming. I dare say that's the smoke that you see now. They know what to do;"* and again she relapsed into the region of her own sad thoughts.

* By burning the grass around the fences, &c., previously to the arrival of the bush-fire, it is left without material to feed upon; and then, unless there

The sun sank lower—sank to the very edge of the sky; began to merge its disc behind the mountain ridge; yet tenderly as that young woman and her aged monitress loved one another they still sat in silence. Margaret had long given up as vain the endeavour to draw Mary into conversation; and Mary's heart was too busy with its sad office within to attend to any save the most urgent ones without. The first love of womanhood is always replete with veneration; and veneration is at once the most strenuous of the faculties in itself, and the least liable to the control of the others.

Still lower sank the sun; glittered—a mere short line of splendour; twinkled—a single spark; and was gone. A few minutes afterwards the old woman began to move uneasily, and like one who is astonished; but Mary saw it not: her eyes were fixed upon her work, her thoughts were far away; and the deep sigh itself that bespoke their occupation only made its way forth after a struggle, with short, convulsive heavings of the bosom.

"Bairn!" exclaimed the old woman, seriously, my sight is gone!"

"What did you say, Margaret?" responded Mary, after a few moments, but without looking up, and speaking in the tone of those who try to bear patiently the annoyance of some useless trespass on their attention from one they love.

"I cannot see, my bairn. It is all dark," answered the nurse, after also herself pausing for a little while.

"Oh, Margaret!" exclaimed Mary, "how can you talk so? I know how you love me, and that you would do anything to divert my thoughts; but——"

"Nay, bairn: when did I ever jest about the mighty power of God!"

"Margaret, what do you mean?" and, startled by the tone in which the old woman uttered her appeal, Mary sprang up, and laying her hand on her shoulder, bent and looked into her eyes. "Why, your eyes are as bright as mine; brighter than mine will be a twelvemonth hence. Dear Margaret, how you terrified me: and your face too! you look as if you really meant it."

"My bairn," repeated the old woman, "I tell you I can see no more than if my eyes were already buried in the grave. I hear whereabouts your face is as you speak, but I cannot see you—cannot see the bush, or the water: even the light itself I cannot see. Oh, me——"

is also forest up to the very spot, it must stop. Settlers who are hemmed in by dense forest generally take the precaution of clearing that for some space all around. If they do not, they are soon taught. When the grass is artificially fired, the parties doing it only allow small portions to be afire at a time, watching its advance, and smothering and beating it out with large boughs, when it has done just enough.

"Margaret! Margaret! what is the matter?—why do you weep? What shall I do?"

"My bairn, my dear kind bairn, I am not far from home. Oh, that Reuben were here! I wish I could see him once more. Let one of the men fetch him."

The last sentence was uttered with such incoherent expression in gesture and voice, that Mary at once reached the comprehension of the truth; but on trying to get the old woman to go in-doors, she discovered that she was unable to rise from her chair: the lower extremities were powerless.

Mary ran into the kitchen for old Jemmy: he was not to be seen anywhere about:—to the huts; the men were all gone. She bethought herself of the sailors, and ran down to the wharf to try if she could secure the observation of any of them by a signal; but there lay the dingy at the wharf: and then she recollected that in all probability they were all off into the bush to look after the fire. After a great struggle, by her utmost strength she succeeded in getting her helpless burden into her own room; it was that immediately at the back of the little breakfast parlour, and entered by a door through the further wall of that room.

By this time, the short twilight of the country was almost at an end: a thick shadow was spreading itself over everything, and as Mary stood out a little way from the back verandah, and listened for some shout to indicate whereabouts the men were, not a sound could be heard save the mingled roar of the coming fire and the wind: nothing moved but the agitated tree-tops: even the dogs were gone off into the bush. A single cow stood, disturbed and melancholy, outside the stockyard, waiting to be admitted to her calf. Mary knew now that she could do nothing but wait patiently beside Margaret, till the return of some of the men from the bush.

She found Margaret, on going in, just as she left her, as to position, but breathing at times very heavily, and then again with more freeness; at times, also, there was a little girgling in her throat. On lighting a candle, her face exhibited nothing alarming—but beamed with a bright and rapt tranquillity, without a single trace of pain. On speaking to her, Mary found she was once more perfectly sensible. After a few sentences, the old woman said:—

"Light a candle, honie, and sit down beside me."

Mary sighed as she sat down, observing,—"The candle is a-light, Margaret."

"Nay, honie ——"

"Yes, Margaret, indeed: recollect your sight is gone."

The old woman seemed to recollect that it was so: but she expressed the recollection no further than by a slight sigh. Mary knelt down at the bedside and grasped her hand.

"Honie," said the nurse, "I want to see Reuben. Where

is he? Why does he not come? Why do you sob so? My sweet bairn, kiss me. Why do you sob so? Ah, me! I cannot understand what I am talking about. It seems as if I was here, and yet not here."

After pausing a little while, she proceeded:—

"I hope the fire won't get to the stacks. When Reuben comes in, tell him—ah! me, I'm lost again—oh! tell him conscience is the ear of the mind; and whenever we listen with it we may hear the voice of God: *that* ever rolls across the universe announcing HIS whereabouts: if we follow the sound we shall surely reach the realms at length where HE himself is. Only he must mind not to mistake the clamour of his own heart for the Voice. *Be sure to tell him that.* But he'll be coming now: go out, bairn, and see if you can see him. I hope the fire won't get to the stacks. I know something is going to happen."

Mary, now thoroughly aroused by the solemn transaction that was so unexpectedly progressing before her, and thinking some of the people might be by this time returned, went out once more. All was now perfectly dark out of doors, save for the lurid, red, hazy gleam that was reflected round through the atmosphere on to the open ground and its buildings. As she stood, there seemed to come voices in dispute from the other side of the creek, from towards the haunted house: one in particular there seemed, speaking clear stern tones of command. Then, though she listened attentively, all remained silent. But when her attention had again wandered to the fire, she thought she heard another snatch of the very same sounds. But no; the longer she listened the more silent everything in that direction seemed to become; save that her excited ear began to distinguish every change in the splash of the running stream.

She turned to go in; at the instant she did so, Tony came bounding, in spite of his age and helplessness, with all the freakish gambols of a puppy towards her, from downwards of the bay, as if he had come from or through Willoughby's farm. He pretended to bite her hand; and then laid down his head and rubbed it against her ancles, and lifted it and stood for an instant and looked her in the face with a strange *wow, wow, wow,* that was like laughter, and tossed himself up and pawed with his forelegs in the air, and gave another yelp that seemed a cheer or madness. "Oh, Tony, Tony!" cried Mary, "foolish, wicked dog! playing, and the dear old hand that gave you milk when your mother died and you couldn't see, now dying within. Go away, sir. No! here, come in and see her."

The old dog assumed a humble attitude, and, without a single look toward the fire, whither the other dogs were gone, began to follow his mistress in. But when he was half inside the doorway, he suddenly threw himself round and ran out and

stood under the verandah, and burst out into one of his wild volleys of wrath, till the very air itself vibrated, as under the roar of a lion. He walked to and fro, as if he could not make out which way the offending object lay:—now turning down the bay, now looking toward the fire, now examining the bush towards the haunted house. But when Mary gave up listening and looking with him, he, too, gave up his watch, and following close at her heels, went in with her.

"That fellow 'll give you a job," said Morgan to Beck, who, with the rest of the gang, was now on the side of the creek next to the haunted house. You'd better look that the priming hasn't shook out of the pans of your pistols."

"Oh, I've done all that already, as I lay waiting for you. I should think I've had time enough," said the black.

"Well, now you all mind what I say," he continued, after a pause of thought. "A clear thing can be but a clear thing, and here it is before our faces. All the powers of man couldn't make it plainer nor better. You do your parts as I tell you, and trust to my doing mine. I've got the dangerous part of the thing: yours is only a bit of holiday pastime—rowing a boat from the bank to a vessel. I saw three hands row ashore, and I know such a craft in this trade never carries above four. You see I'm right, too, about all hands being off to look after the fences: you see, all the time Kable's sister stood out under the verandah, nobody came out of the huts; nor did she go to them to ask anything. And all the dogs, too, are gone with the men, or else, when that old dog yelped out as he did, the whole pack would have been at it. So just make sure of the sloop first (the dingy won't carry us all, and it's got so late, there'll be no time to spare); and then—you, Rooney, can pull a boat well, you say—bring the dingy back for——"

The black paused, as if he had come unintentionally on a point that still puzzled him.

"For you!" said Rooney. "Well?"

"Ay, well: then don't mind my pistol-shot. That 'll be for the dog. But if you hear a second shot, or more, then take it for certain that there's something amiss, and rouse up the anchor as fast as you can, and let the sloop drift off down the bay with the tide (only mind and keep her well off this side and the mud flats—you can manage the rudder well enough for that) and the dingy 'll be still towing alongside, you know—you mustn't get *it* aboard;—I'll push off down the side of the bay, and when I fire a shot a couple or three miles down, bring the dingy to me. If they miss the dingy, they'll never think the sloop's gone, and it's too dark and smoky for them to see; they'll only think the dingy's got adrift, and will strand somewhere down below by morning. If I make a bonfire, it won't be till I'm just coming away. Do just what I say. I'll answer for the rest."

"Stop!" he cried, as they were parting; "don't you set a sail; nor don't let it be set. Mind what I say. Make the fellow that's aboard steer: if he won't, with such a stream as there is, and the wind right across the bay, you can't help seeing which is the channel."

Once more they were moving off.

"Stop! stop!" he said again. "If you find the wind very strong on you (it's heavy and right abeam), hold against it a little—like this;" and he took hold of Rooney's arm and communicated to him the particular motion to give the rudder. "And if you *should* happen to get on one of the flats—but you're better men at this pinch of the game than that—blaze up the fire and show me where you are, and I'll hail you: and then be as smart as you can with the boat. It's your only chance for 'Timo,' Rooney: so look after it. Morgan, here lad; twenty miles out to sea for you, or Sydney gaol by to-morrow night. Soger—but you and I could *always* understand one another. Now, just straight forward, you know."

As, after a few minutes from this time, the black stopped and listened within a few feet of the front verandah, he could hear only two voices. They were women's, conversing and pausing, and speaking again.

"Nay, bairn: have I not loved myself? And that cannot be wrong which all do and the holiest the most devoutly. I wish Reuben would come. I never heard him murmur in a dark dream of his sleep when he was a helpless child, but I ran to awaken and comfort him. Alas—alas—alas! none are faithful to us but the God on high!"

"Oh! what shall I do? Margaret, will you have a little wine?"

A feeble chuckling laugh was the answer.

"Honie! kiss me once more! Wine? bairn!—You think I am not myself. Once more, dearest child," she cried as Mary kissed her, "once more—once more. And, because it is more blessed to give than to receive, and the last counsels of the just are of the nature of an immortal treasure, observe what I say,—If Willoughby returns, and you two become as one, all through your future life, let nothing make you forget him for an instant: if he return not, banish the thought, and let nothing make you remember him. You cannot bear it; and God has His own purposes, and they are greater than man's."

The black could partly hear what was said—occasional words. As he was about to draw nearer, to look through the window, a wild, spirit-stirring tune came rolling up the waters below, but from some way down the bay. What could it be? Probably some settler's boat coming over from the other side to give a hand at the fire.

He could hear the cadences; but he could not hear the song.

That, even where it was merrily pealing forth, was half stifled by the wind.

"There's nothing half so pleasant,
When the wild seas roar,
As a snug berth aboard,
But a double bed ashore."

"Come, you lay to your oar," shouted the coxswain to the half-boy, half-man, that sat next in front of him, "or you'll go overboard, and I'll take your oar myself; and you'll have to stop on the bank till we come back in the morning."

"The *Daisy* won't hurt, sir," said the youth, as he saw the coxswain stand up in the boat, and turned his own head and observed the blaze; but he added, "by jinks it's pretty close."

"You drop your chanting, then," said the coxswain; "you're throwing all the oars out of stroke. Next time you come with me on such a trip you won't have so much grog."

And once more, all six hands reduced to a common stroke, on shot the speedy dashing whaleboat up the bay.

The black bethought himself that the time was going on, and the murmurings of women's voices, after all, were no more to him than a troubling of the air. He advanced and looked through the window.

"Oh!—Oh!—What is that?" shrieked Mary. "Oh, Margaret! there is some dreadful thing outside."

Margaret now seemed sleeping; her face was the fixed, still face of a corpse; but the placid rapture of the departing soul whose work is accomplished, giving its testimony to the yet unperfect, shone like a heavenly light into Mary's heart.

"Who are you?" she asked, as she rose and took the candlestick in her hand and advanced into the other room, and approached the window.

"It's only me, Miss," said the black, as he opened the parlour door and took hold of her arm. "Don't be alarmed."

"What are you?" cried Mary. Then, as she looked at him again and saw his face, and fell on her knees, she said, "Don't be cruel to me."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed the black, as he almost kicked her aside. Before the sound had well time to form itself on the ear, the quick, heavy footfalls of the old dog, who had some time before his entrance bounded off downwards to the bay, were heard, mingled with his heavy breathing, as he again entered the passage. The black, who had kept his pistol all the while in his right hand, with a finger on the trigger, turned, and as the faithful animal stopped and couched back on his hind-quarters for a spring, fired. The charge had no room to spread, but went bodily into his chest; and when the smoke rose away on the draft of the air, his old grisly form lay mo-

tionless on its side, save for a little moving of the limbs, and two or three convulsive tossings of the head.

After looking round the parlour, Beck went on to the bedroom. There he stood as if thunderstruck for an instant; for his clearly-defining mind saw what Mary had not seen—that it was actual death.

"Young lady," he said, "I see the old woman is just dead. I won't hurt you: but I must have some money."

"Yes," said Mary. And she went to the drawers of Margaret's room and brought out her own little gay purse and Margaret's.

"There's more than this in the house," said the black. "This is your money and the old woman's. Where does Reuben keep his? Oh, by the ——! I forgot."

He took the candle and passed into the passage, and hastily all over the cottage, then looked out at the back door. But his glance, able as it was, could discern no materials for effectuating the bonfire he had intended.

"Sophy, or whatever your name is," he said, on re-entering the parlour, where Mary sat, panting, and sometimes moaning, and then checking herself and listening,—"will you give me the money?"

"You've got it."

"I mean Reuben's."

"He's got none—he never keeps any here."

"His watch." It had been his father's watch: and Mary knew it.

"His watch! Do you hear me?"

"Yes."

"Why don't you tell me, then?"

"Because I won't."

"You won't? No! is that it? Pluck among the women! Ha! ha! ha! Will you turn it up?"

"No!"

"If you don't, you'll have to go with me. What do you say?"

The poor girl made no reply; but sat as she was.

"Will you give it to me?"

No answer.

"Then I'll try whether I can make you."

And he stepped forward, and lifting her hand far above her head with his left, grasped it in his right, and wrung it round. On to tiptoe she rose, to ease her wrist, and then screamed bitterly, and fell.

Instantly, outside, there was the sound of a piece going off, and the snapping of the glass of the window, and the black sprang, as if bounding in some uncouth dance, and reeled, and fell.

As Mary struggled up from the dreaded contaminating touch,

a face—Willoughby's own—white as if from the cerements of the grave, presented itself to her gaze, coming in at the door.

"Oh, Willoughby! not yet—not yet!" she shrieked. "I'll come—I'll come:—not now!" and, rushing into the other room, she cowered behind the dead, upon the utmost corner of the bed.

The young seaman stopped, and dropped the butt of his fowling-piece on the floor, and had rammed down the powder, and was placing a ball in the muzzle, when a strong hand was laid on his shoulder, and shook him—

"Don't mangle the dying, Willoughby," said Reuben, pushing him aside, and stepping over the convulsed mass that was plunging about the floor, and making his way into Margaret's room.

"Mary—my own beautiful darling!" but she only screamed, and cowered behind the dead. Again he spoke as he bent over her; but she only reiterated her screams, and shrank down in more frantic terror: at last he was obliged to lift her by force. Then, when she felt who it was, she clung round his neck: but the words she kept hastily trying to utter to him no one could understand.

"Willoughby! drag that accursed thing out: it will kill her if she sees it again. And she must go out into the air, or she'll die. Be alive!" he shouted, impatiently, as the struggling and rumbling of the chairs told how slowly it could be performed. But at last the noise came from the front verandah; and Reuben hastily carried out his sister to the back of the cottage, where, speechless, she continued to cling, in a sort of sullen terror, to his neck.

At the instance of his friend, Willoughby hastened back to his boat, and, rowing out to where the *Mary Kable* was likely to be at anchor, arrived just in time to catch sight of her drifting, at some distance off, down the bay. The outlaws, mistaking Willoughby's shot for the black's signal to them, had heaved up the anchor immediately they heard it. They, however, observed that they were chased by the six-oared whale-boat before it could overtake them, and, getting into the dingy, rowed away. In the darkness and smoke of the night, all trace of their fate was lost: henceforth it remained matter of mere conjecture. The *Mary Kable's* dingy was picked up next day by one of the little coasters, floating bottom upwards, several miles out at sea.

From its long-drawn experience, the world has delivered us a peevish apophthegm—"That it never rains, but it pours" with some people. As a truth, it is well enough; the application only is faulty. The dull and stolid require no culture of their fortitude: open to no passionate impulses, they need versing in no great self-control. But others, of more energetic temperament, in various degrees find their whole lives an

alternation of vicissitudes; and, as families so much follow a common character, so, properly enough, it falls to them to share a common lot. By this prompting experience only should we learn to labour for and attain the "even mind," without which passion becomes madness, and power degenerates into violence.

That tendency even, which exists so widely, to blame with unmeasured severity those whose whole lives present but a single catalogue of misfortune, is an erroneous one—as much erroneous as that other bias of common minds, to almost worship such as have become crowned with great success. Success is as often Heaven's exhilarant, distributed in compassion to the faint-hearted, as aught else: a stimulus, and an acknowledgment that they have done their best. The great and tireless spirits may have the spur given them, and rouse at its touch into loftier bursts of vigour, whilst the feebler would shrink beneath it, and give up the race. Indeed, all the dispensations of this world, to be looked at truly, must be considered in regard to the ultimate, not the past. We are not to forget that success and honour are the meed of courageous human toil: but far less must we fail to keep in mind how much in all things there is of a divine destiny. And that looks at the future. Whilst men are not left cheerless, hopeless, aimless, by a neglect of the recognition of their toils in the *brief past*,—the grand, the never-lost-sight-of point is incitement to a heroic *eternity*.

Several days passed before any tidings could reach the Morrumbidgee respecting the fierce struggle so gravely, yet happily, concluded at Brisbane Water. The crisis once known, by the lapse of sufficient time, to be passed, all minds were silently, but progressively, schooling themselves to hear, with chastened joy or submissive lament, the announcement of the Will Supreme. Then came the heavenly token that its design was thus far fully accomplished upon their characters,—the best of tidings arrived in the most welcome of forms, giving in an hour a moral totality to years. They had gone through their struggle, they had learned their lesson of fortitude, all to the present utmost of their ability: and now came the reward.

As Marianna was now too much occupied with some one else to bestow much of her time on her friend, Rachael had not been over to the Rocky Springs for a couple of days; when, as late in the afternoon she sat sewing in her little parlour, two or three sharp raps resounded from the open leaf of the store-door, that opened against the wall at her back. As Mr. Oshee now rarely conducted any part of the business, except taking his wages, she rose at once, and went to see who it was. The visitant was, in one respect, such an one as she often saw—a toil-worn, bedusted horseman, young and vigorous, but seemingly almost too languid with the heat and over-

exertion. When she came out he bowed; but though he cast his eyes round the store, they settled nowhere. After an instant she looked at him again; and now he was looking also steadfastly at her.

"You seem very tired indeed, sir," said Rachael; "I'll bring you a chair."

"No, no!—never mind a chair, Rachael," replied the stranger, in a rapid, energetic, familiar way; it seemed to her she was quite used to it, and yet could not be, for she had never seen the speaker before. "If *you'll* give me half a glass of good brandy in a little water, Rachael," continued the traveller, "*I'll* drink it. Meantime I shall just sit down on these tea-chests in the draught of the door."

Rachael hastened to provide the desired refreshment. The stranger's eyes seemed to indicate that he felt some singular interest in her, for they accompanied every motion. Rachael instinctively felt this, and hardly liked it: but there was something so perfectly manly, and so unsophisticated about her youthful customer (as she supposed he would be); he was really so evidently one of nature's noblesse, and, though so staid and weary, yet yielded such an impression of liability to be thrown into intensest activity by a single touch on any one of the great springs of the soul, that after all she only thought about being vexed, but did not feel so. Nevertheless, there was actual effect of some sort on her, for her hand which held the glass trembled considerably.

"Ah! well!" half said, half sighed the stranger, "I suppose I may as well —— my dear Miss Rachael!" he cried, springing at a couple of strides to her side, and taking the glass from her hand—for she was suddenly trembling so violently that she could scarcely hold it—"are you ill?"

A single glance at the stranger's face, now illumined by feeling, made good what the first unrestrained expression of his voice in that brief soliloquy had begun, and identified him beyond all doubt, with one who, whatever *she* might be to *him*, was far from being a stranger to her.

"My *dear* Miss Moses," said the brother of her friend, with all her friend's own pointed and tender emphasis, "I am so sorry I have startled you. I had no notion—that—though you have been so kind and faithful to my relatives, that you cared so much about them and theirs."

Rachael's heart was as simple as a child's; and the evasive conclusion of the sentence led her to believe for an instant that he had not penetrated her feelings: but the very first glance dispelled the illusion. It was Marianna's keen searching eye from a higher position; and she felt at once helpless in Charles Bracton's hands. But it was a noble foe she had to deal with.

"You have been to them, Rachael, as kind and good as I have been unprofitable. It is I who ought to blush, Rachael,

not you. For my own part I can only say, that I never longed for anything in my life so much as to see you; or ever so felt how much too little I had longed when my wish came to pass, as I do now."

Re-assured by the unhesitating acknowledgment, Rachael invited her guest to enter and rest himself.

"No," he said; "I am afraid that hereafter you will think me coming too often: but this afternoon I must hurry on. I am at present Willoughby's messenger. I heard of his ship getting into Sydney Cove just before ours, and sought him. He was just about to send a messenger. Mr. Kable, of Broken Bay (I think they call it), and Willoughby, have, it appears, settled this gang of bushrangers between them: but not without a severe fright to Miss Kable. Here's a letter for Kate. I suppose you can guess who it's from?"

But after they had shaken hands and mutually said farewell, and Charles was even partly beyond the door, he stopped, turned, paused, thought and seemed to come to the conclusion that still there was something more required by the circumstances from him. Advancing towards Rachael again, he said:—

"Don't suppose, Rachael, that I am such a dolt as not to know and feel, too, that there is a beauty of the soul, and a delight in the contemplation of it infinitely beyond all else:—the noblest woman can degrade herself into hideousness, and the plainest hide her plainness in the most transcendant grace, by the beauty or the deformity of her acts. But when the spiritual and the sensible are both found in the one—*can* one do any otherwise than adore her?"

And as Charles once more uttered, with all his sister's clear expression, his thoughts, he drew forth and displayed to the astonished sight of Rachael a miniature of herself exquisitely painted.

"Now, don't be angry with Marianna about it," he said. "It came just in time to enable me to fight the battle of that long, terrible suspense! Oh, Rachael; if it hadn't been for you!—what should I have been?"

Another hour, and there was joy such as there had never been before at the Rocky Springs. At the urgent demand of more stirring events we have had to pass over the minor ones. Funds to an amount far beyond what the occasion demanded were now at Mr. Bracton's service; and Willoughby, informed by Reuben Kable of the state of affairs, had promptly applied them. Before Willoughby left Brisbane Water the "Daisy" had recovered, and slept a little, and was become quite herself again.—So mighty are the powers of life in the warm breast of youth.

Months have rolled on. The black and his victim lie buried in distant graves. The fate of the three outlaws who escaped,

as already stated, remains testified by no other sign than the state and situation in which their boat was found. Mr. and Mrs. Simons are in charge of the tap-room plate at a house of entertainment, a good way off from the Royal Hotel. Grimsby has become a better police officer in the exact proportion that he has become a worse customer at the public house. Mr. Peter Burnes has transferred his license, at the unanimous request of the magistrates. Dubbo is a square man. And John Thomas and Biddy are now man and wife. The Considerate man approves of it all fully:—"It's just that there very thing what might have been suspected all along."

As to the superior parties:—Katharine and Mary are next-door neighbours at the Bay: when they can make up their minds to part, of which, however, there seems no great likelihood at an early date, Reuben will leave the whole of the ground there to his sister, and begin afresh up the country; or, perhaps, migrate to some other part of the immense island. Meantime, he and Willoughby go on much as when they first became acquainted; for Willoughby has very properly concluded—as first shown, however, by the Daisy—that it is better to have a wife and plenty to live on, than lose wife, and self, and all, in trying to get too much. Marianna is to have the Rocky Springs eventually: but the Old Tar and his helpmate seem to have taken so unequivocally a fresh lease of life, since Charles came out, and all began to go prosperously under sedulous guidance, that the whole family concur in finding that it would be absurd for Marianna to think of waiting till she could install Mr. Hurley into shepherding his own sheep *there*. Consequently, for the present, she is Mrs. Hurley, junior, assisting Mrs. Hurley, senior, to cheer the young magistrate on through the toils of his duties. Finally, Mr. Charles Bracton seems in great danger of being thrown on the alternatives of what the old gentleman can give him alone, or that, together with Rachael and from six to seven thousand pounds. Rachael says that, after making a careful calculation, she finds she is *not worth quite the latter sum*. But the young surgeon laughs at her; and tells her she is *worth a hundred thousand times more than that*.

THE END.

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